

A Second Round
OF
T A L E S

Selected by

N. HENRY & H. A. TREBLE

Editors of *A Round of Tales from Washington*
Irving to Algernon Blackwood



Date: - 28. 6. 1930.

A: No: - 13,329.

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
HUMPHREY MILFORD

Oxford University Press

London Edinburgh Glasgow Copenhagen
New York Toronto Melbourne Cape Town
Bombay Calcutta Madras Shanghai

Humphrey Milford, Publisher to the UNIVERSITY

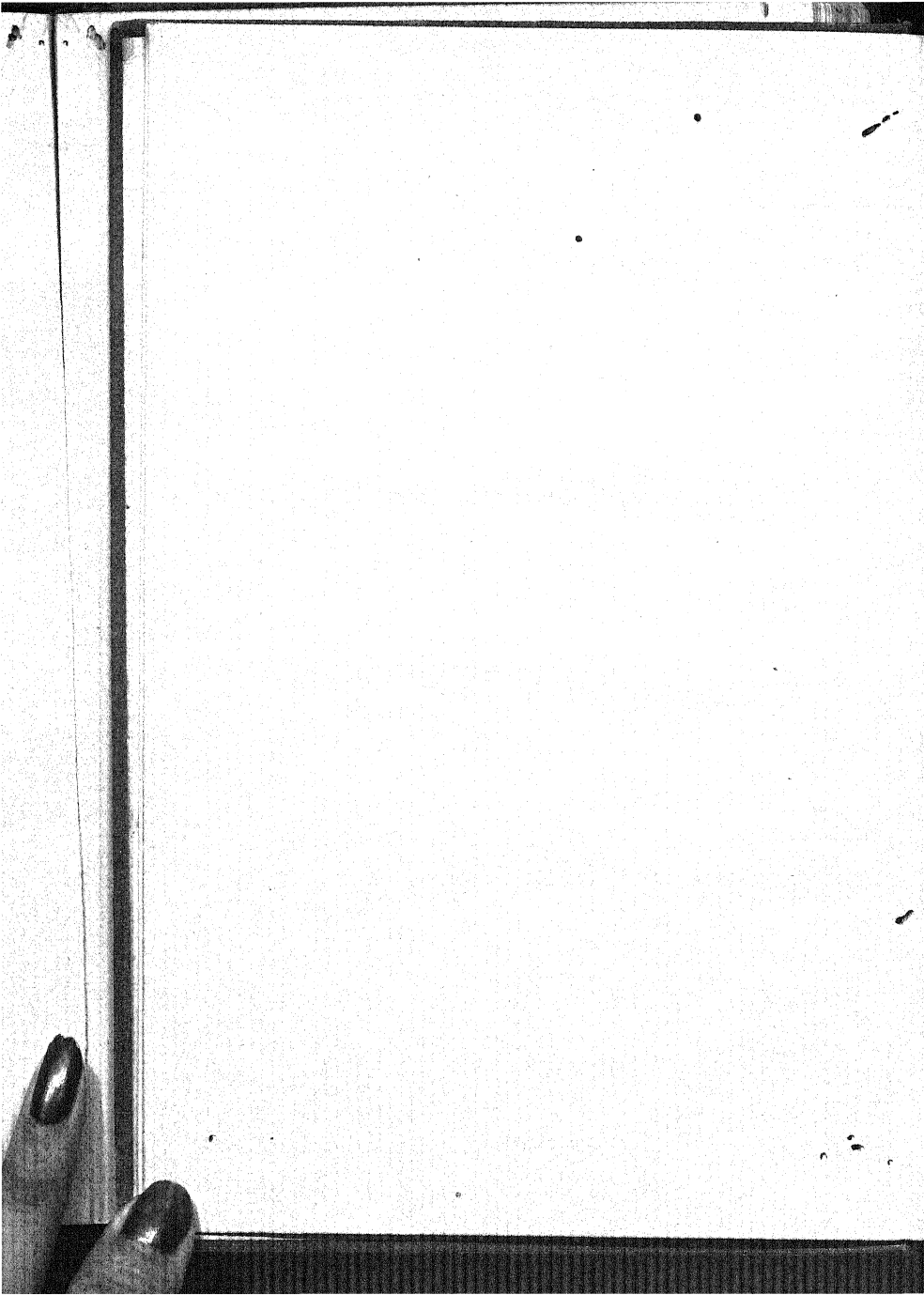
Impression of 1928.

First Edition, 1926.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY ROBERT MACLEHOSE AND CO. LTD.
THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, GLASGOW.

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WASHINGTON IRVING

1783-1859

LEGEND OF THE TWO DISCREET STATUES

THERE lived once in a waste apartment of the Alhambra, a merry little fellow, named Lope Sanchez, who worked in the gardens, and was as brisk and blithe as a grasshopper, singing all day long. He was the life and soul of the fortress; when his work was over he would sit on one of the stone benches of the esplanade, strum his guitar, and sing long ditties about the Cid, and Bernardo del Carpio, and Fernando del Pulgar, and other Spanish heroes, for the amusement of the old soldiers of the fortress, or would strike up a merrier tune, and set the girls dancing boleros and fandangos.

Like most little men, Lope Sanchez had a strapping, buxom dame for a wife, who could almost have put him in her pocket; but he lacked the usual poor man's lot—instead of ten children he had but one. This was a little black-eyed girl about twelve years of age, named Sanchica, who was as merry as himself, and the delight of his heart. She played about him as he worked in the gardens, danced to his guitar as he sat in the shade, and ran as wild as a young fawn about the groves and alleys and ruined halls of the Alhambra.

It was now the eve of the blessed St. John, and the holiday-loving gossips of the Alhambra, men, women, and children, went up at night to the mountain of the Sun, which rises above the Generalife, to keep their midsummer vigil on its level summit. It was a bright moonlight night, and all the mountains were grey and silvery, and the city, with its domes and spires, lay in

shadows below, and the Vega was like a fairy land, with haunted streams gleaming among its dusky groves. On the highest part of the mountain they lit up a bonfire, according to an old custom of the country handed down from the Moors. The inhabitants of the surrounding country were keeping a similar vigil, and bonfires, here and there in the Vega, and along the folds of the mountains, blazed up palely in the moonlight.

The evening was gaily passed in dancing to the guitar of Lope Sanchez, who was never so joyous as when on a holiday revel of the kind. While the dance was going on, the little Sanchica, with some of her playmates, sported among the ruins of an old Moorish fort that crowns the mountains, when, in gathering pebbles in the fosse, she found a small hand curiously carved of jet, the fingers closed, and the thumb firmly clasped upon them. Overjoyed with her good fortune, she ran to her mother with her prize. It immediately became a subject of sage speculation, and was eyed by some with superstitious distrust. 'Throw it away,' said one; 'it's Moorish—depend upon it there's mischief and witchcraft in it.' 'By no means,' said another; 'you may sell it for something to the jewellers of the Zacatin.' In the midst of this discussion an old tawny soldier drew near, who had served in Africa, and was as swarthy as a Moor. He examined the hand with a knowing look. 'I have seen things of this kind,' said he, 'among the Moors of Barbary. It is a great virtue to guard against the evil eye, and all kinds of spells and enchantments. I give you joy, friend Lope; this bodes good luck to your child.'

Upon hearing this, the wife of Lope Sanchez tied the little hand of jet to a ribbon, and hung it round the neck of her daughter.

The sight of this talisman called up all the favourite superstitions about the Moors. The dance was neglected, and they sat in groups on the ground, telling old legendary tales handed down from their ancestors. Some of their stories turned upon the wonders of the very mountain upon which they were seated, which is a famous hobgoblin region. One ancient crone gave a long account of the

subterranean palace in the bowels of that mountain where Boabdil and all his Moslem Court are said to remain enchanted. 'Among yonder ruins,' said she, pointing to some crumbling walls and mounds of earth on a distant part of the mountain, 'there is a deep black pit that goes down, down into the very heart of the mountain. For all the money in Granada I would not look down into it. Once upon a time a poor man of the Alhambra, who tended goats upon this mountain, scrambled down into that pit after a kid that had fallen in. He came out again all wild and staring, and told such things of what he had seen, that every one thought his brain was turned. He raved for a day or two about the hobgoblin Moors that had pursued him in the cavern, and could hardly be persuaded to drive his goats up again to the mountain. He did so at last, but, poor man, he never came down again. The neighbours found his goats browsing about the Moorish ruins, and his hat and mantle lying near the mouth of the pit, but he was never more heard of.'

The little Sanchica listened with breathless attention to this story. She was of a curious nature, and felt immediately a great hankering to peep into this dangerous pit. Stealing away from her companions, she sought the distant ruins, and after groping for some time among them came to a small hollow, or basin, near the brow of the mountain, where it swept steeply down into the valley of the Darro. In the centre of this basin yawned the mouth of the pit. Sanchica ventured to the verge, and peeped in. All was as black as pitch, and gave an idea of immeasurable depth. Her blood ran cold; she drew back, then peeped in again, then would have run away, then took another peep—the very horror of the thing was delightful to her. At length she rolled a large stone, and pushed it over the brink. For some time it fell in silence; then struck some rocky projection with a violent crash, then rebounded from side to side, rumbling and tumbling, with a noise like thunder, then made a final splash into water, far, far below—and all was again silent.

The silence, however, did not long continue. It

seemed as if something had been awakened within this dreary abyss. A murmuring sound gradually rose out of the pit like the hum and buzz of a beehive. It grew louder and louder ; there was the confusion of voices as of a distant multitude, together with the faint din of arms, clash of cymbals and clangour of trumpets, as if some army were marshalling for battle in the very bowels of the mountain.

The child drew off with silent awe, and hastened back to the place where she had left her parents and their companions. All were gone. The bonfire was expiring, and its last wreath of smoke curling up in the moonshine. The distant fires that had blazed along the mountains and in the Vega were all extinguished, and everything seemed to have sunk to repose. Sanchica called her parents and some of her companions by name, but received no reply. She ran down the side of the mountain and by the gardens of the Generalife, until she arrived in the alley of trees leading to the Alhambra, when she seated herself on a bench of a woody recess to recover breath. The bell from the watch-tower of the Alhambra tolled midnight. There was a deep tranquillity, as if all nature slept ; excepting the low tinkling sound of an unseen stream that ran under the covert of the bushes. The breathing sweetness of the atmosphere was lulling her to sleep, when her eye was caught by something glittering at a distance, and to her surprise she beheld a long cavalcade of Moorish warriors pouring down the mountain-side and along the leafy avenues. Some were armed with lances and shields ; others with scimitars and battle-axes and with polished cuirasses that flashed in the moonbeams. Their horses pranced proudly and champed upon their bits, but their tramp caused no more sound than if they had been shod with felt, and the riders were all as pale as death. Among them rode a beautiful lady, with a crowned head and long golden locks entwined with pearls. The housings of her palfrey were of crimson velvet embroidered with gold, and swept the earth ; but she rode all disconsolate, with eyes ever fixed upon the ground.

Then succeeded a train of courtiers magnificently arrayed in robes and turbans of divers colours, and amidst them, on a cream-coloured charger, rode King Boabdil el Chico, in a royal mantle covered with jewels, and a crown sparkling with diamonds. The little Sanchica knew him by his yellow beard, and his resemblance to his portrait, which she had often seen in the picture-gallery of the Generalife. She gazed in wonder and admiration at this royal pageant, as it passed glistening among the trees ; but though she knew these monarchs and courtiers and warriors, so pale and silent, were out of the common course of nature, and things of magic and enchantment, yet she looked on with a bold heart, such courage did she derive from the mystic talisman of the hand, which was suspended about her neck.

The cavalcade having passed by, she rose and followed. It continued on to the great Gate of Justice, which stood wide open ; the old invalid sentinels on duty lay on the stone benches of the barbican, buried in profound and apparently charmed sleep, and the phantom pageant ~~swept noiselessly by them~~ with flaunting banner and triumphant state. Sanchica would have followed ; but to her surprise she beheld an opening in the earth, within the barbican, leading down beneath the foundations of the tower. She entered for a little distance, and was encouraged to proceed by finding steps rudely hewn in the rock, and a vaulted passage here and there lit up by a silver lamp, which, while it gave light, diffused likewise a grateful fragrance. Venturing on, she came at last to a great hall, wrought out of the heart of the mountain, magnificently furnished in the Moorish style, and lighted up by silver and crystal lamps. Here, on an ottoman, sat an old man in Moorish dress, with a long white beard, nodding and dozing, with a staff in his hand, which seemed ever to be slipping from his grasp ; while at a little distance sat a beautiful lady, in ancient Spanish dress, with a coronet all sparkling with diamonds, and her hair entwined with pearls, who was softly playing on a silver lyre. The little Sanchica now recollected a story she had heard among the old people of the Alhambra,

concerning a Gothic princess confined in the centre of the mountain by an old Arabian magician, whom she kept bound up in magic sleep by the power of music.

The lady paused with surprise at seeing a mortal in that enchanted hall. 'Is it the eve of the blessed St. John?' said she.

'It is,' replied Sanchica.

'Then for one night the magic charm is suspended. Come hither, child, and fear not. I am a Christian like thyself, though bound here by enchantment. Touch my fetters with the talisman that hangs about thy neck, and for this night I shall be free.'

So saying, she opened her robes and displayed a broad golden band round her waist, and a golden chain that fastened her to the ground. The child hesitated not to apply the little hand of jet to the golden band, and immediately the chain fell to the earth. At the sound the old man woke and began to rub his eyes; but the lady ran her fingers over the chords of the lyre, and again he fell into a slumber and began to nod, and his staff to falter in his hand. 'Now,' said the lady, 'touch his staff with the talismanic hand of jet.' The child did so, and it fell from his grasp, and he sank in a deep sleep on the ottoman. The lady gently laid the silver lyre on the ottoman, leaning it against the head of the sleeping magician; then, touching the cords until they vibrated in his ear—'O potent spirit of harmony,' said she, 'continue thus to hold his senses in thralldom till the return of day. Now follow me, my child,' continued she, 'and thou shalt behold the Alhambra as it was in the days of its glory, for thou hast a magic talisman that reveals all enchantments.' Sanchica followed the lady in silence. They passed up through the entrance of the cavern into the barbican of the Gate of Justice, and thence to the Plaza de los Algibes, or esplanade within the fortress.

This was all filled with Moorish soldiery, horse and foot, marshalled in squadrons, with banners displayed. There were royal guards also at the portal, and rows of African blacks with drawn scimitars. No one spoke a word, and Sanchica passed on fearlessly after her conductor.

Her astonishment increased on entering the royal palace, in which she had been reared. The broad moonshine lit up all the halls and courts and gardens almost as brightly as if it were day, but revealed a far different scene from that to which she was accustomed. The walls of the apartments were no longer stained and rent by time. Instead of cobwebs, they were now hung with rich silks of Damascus, and the gildings and arabesque paintings were restored to their original brilliancy and freshness. The halls, no longer naked and unfurnished, were set out with divans and ottomans of the rarest stuffs, embroidered with pearls and studded with precious gems, and all the fountains in the courts and gardens were playing.

The kitchens were again in full operation ; cooks were busy preparing shadowy dishes, and roasting and boiling the phantoms of pullets and partridges : servants were hurrying to and fro with silver dishes heaped up with dainties, and arranging a delicious banquet. The Court of Lions was thronged with guards, and courtiers, and *alfaquis*, as in the old times of the Moors ; and at the upper end, in the saloon of judgment, sat Boabdil on his throne, surrounded by his Court, and swaying a shadowy sceptre for the night. Notwithstanding all this throng and seeming bustle, not a voice nor a footstep was to be heard ; nothing interrupted the midnight silence but the splashing of the fountains. The little Sanchica followed her conductress in mute amazement about the palace, until they came to a portal opening to the vaulted passages beneath the great tower of Comares. On each side of the portal sat the figure of a nymph, wrought out of alabaster. Their heads were turned aside, and their regards fixed upon the same spot within the vault. The enchanted lady paused, and beckoned the child to her. ' Here,' said she, ' is a great secret, which I will reveal to thee in reward for thy faith and courage. These discreet statues watch over a treasure hidden in old times by a Moorish king. Tell thy father to search the spot on which their eyes are fixed, and he will find what will make him richer than any man in

Granada. Thy innocent hands alone, however, gifted as thou art also with the talisman, can remove the treasure. Bid thy father use it discreetly, and devote a part of it to the performance of daily masses for my deliverance from this unholy enchantment.'

When the lady had spoken these words, she led the child onward to the little garden of Lindaraxa, which is hard by the vault of the statues. The moon trembled upon the waters of the solitary fountain in the centre of the garden, and shed a tender light upon the orange and citron trees. The beautiful lady plucked a branch of myrtle and wreathed it round the head of the child. 'Let this be a memento,' said she, 'of what I have revealed to thee, and a testimonial of its truth. My hour is come; I must return to the enchanted hall; follow me not, lest evil befall thee—farewell. Remember what I have said, and have masses performed for my deliverance.' So saying, the lady entered a dark passage leading beneath the tower of Comares, and was no longer seen.

The faint crowing of a cock was now heard from the cottages below the Alhambra, in the valley of the Darro, and a pale streak of light began to appear above the eastern mountains. A slight wind arose, there was a sound like the rustling of dry leaves through the courts and corridors, and door after door shut to with a jarring sound.

Sanchica returned to the scenes she had so lately beheld thronged with the shadowy multitude, but Boabdil and his phantom Court were gone. The moon shone into empty halls and galleries stripped of their transient splendour, stained and dilapidated by time, and hung with cobwebs. The bat flitted about in the uncertain light, and the frog croaked from the fish-pond.

Sanchica now made the best of her way to a remote staircase that led up to the humble apartment occupied by her family. The door as usual was open, for Lope Sanchez was too poor to need bolt or bar; she crept quietly to her pallet, and, putting the myrtle wreath beneath her pillow, soon fell asleep.

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In the morning she related all that had befallen her to her father. Lope Sanchez, however, treated the whole as a mere dream, and laughed at the child for her credulity. He went forth to his customary labours in the garden, but had not been there long when his little daughter came running to him almost breathless. 'Father! father!' cried she, 'behold the myrtle wreath which the Moorish lady bound round my head.'

Lope Sanchez gazed with astonishment, for the stalk of the myrtle was of pure gold, and every leaf was a sparkling emerald! Being not much accustomed to precious stones, he was ignorant of the real value of the wreath, but he saw enough to convince him that it was something more substantial than the stuff of which dreams are generally made, and that at any rate the child had dreamt to some purpose. His first care was to enjoin the most absolute secrecy upon his daughter; in this respect, however, he was secure, for she had discretion far beyond her years or sex. He then repaired to the vault, where stood the statues of the two alabaster nymphs. He remarked that their heads were turned from the portal, and that the regards of each were fixed upon the same point in the interior of the building. Lope Sanchez could not but admire this most discreet contrivance for guarding a secret. He drew a line from the eyes of the statues to the point of regard, made a private mark on the wall, and then retired.

All day, however, the mind of Lope Sanchez was distracted with a thousand cares. He could not help hovering within distant view of the two statues, and became nervous from the dread that the golden secret might be discovered. Every footstep that approached the place made him tremble. He would have given anything could he but have turned the heads of the statues, forgetting that they had looked precisely in the same direction for some hundreds of years, without any person being the wiser.

'A plague upon them,' he would say to himself, 'they'll betray all; did ever mortal hear of such a mode of guarding a secret?' Then, on hearing any one advance,

he would steal off, as though his very lurking near the place would awaken suspicion. Then he would return cautiously, and peep from a distance to see if everything was secure, but the sight of the statues would again call forth his indignation. 'Aye, there they stand,' would he say, 'always looking, and looking, and looking, just where they should not. Confound them! they are just like all their sex; if they have not tongues to tattle with, they'll be sure to do it with their eyes.'

At length, to his relief, the long anxious day drew to a close. The sound of footsteps was no longer heard in the echoing halls of the Alhambra; the last stranger passed the threshold, the great portal was barred and bolted, and the bat and the frog and the hooting owl gradually resumed their nightly vocations in the deserted palace.

Lope Sanchez waited, however, until the night was far advanced before he ventured with his little daughter to the hall of the two nymphs. He found them looking as knowingly and mysteriously as ever at the secret place of deposit. 'By your leaves, gentle ladies,' thought Lope Sanchez, as he passed between them, 'I will relieve you from this charge that must have sat so heavy in your minds for the last two or three centuries.' He accordingly went to work at the part of the hall which he had marked, and in a little while laid open a concealed recess, in which stood two great jars of porcelain. He attempted to draw them forth, but they were immovable, until touched by the innocent hand of his little daughter. With her aid he dislodged them from their niche, and found, to his great joy, that they were filled with pieces of Moorish gold mingled with jewels and precious stones. Before daylight he managed to convey them to his chamber, and left the two guardian statues with their eyes still fixed on the vacant wall.

Lope Sanchez had thus on a sudden become a rich man; but riches, as usual, brought a world of cares to which he had hitherto been a stranger. How was he to convey away his wealth with safety? How was he even to enter upon the enjoyment of it without awakening suspicion? Now, too, for the first time in his life the dread of robbers

entered into his mind. He looked with terror at the insecurity of his habitation, and went to work to barricade the doors and windows ; yet, after all his precautions, he could not sleep soundly. His usual gaiety was at an end ; he had no longer a joke or a song for his neighbours, and, in short, became the most miserable animal in the Alhambra. His old comrades remarked this alteration, pitied him heartily, and began to desert him ; thinking he must be falling into want, and in danger of looking to them for assistance. Little did they suspect that his only calamity was riches.

The wife of Lope Sanchez shared his anxiety, but then she had ghostly comfort. We ought before this to have mentioned that Lope, being rather a light considerate little man, his wife was accustomed, in all grave matters, to seek the counsel and ministry of her confessor Fray Simon, a sturdy, broad-shouldered, blue-bearded, bullet-headed friar of the neighbouring convent of San Francisco, who was in fact the spiritual comforter of half the good wives of the neighbourhood. He was, moreover, in great esteem among divers sisterhoods of nuns ; who requited him for his ghostly services by frequent presents of those little dainties and knick-knacks manufactured in convents, such as delicate confections, sweet biscuits, and bottles of spiced cordials, found to be marvellous restoratives after fasts and vigils.

Fray Simon thrived in the exercise of his functions. His oily skin glistened in the sunshine as he toiled up the hill of the Alhambra on a sultry day. Yet notwithstanding his sleek condition, the knotted rope round his waist showed the austerity of his self-discipline ; the multitude doffed their caps to him as a mirror of piety, and even the dogs scented the odour of sanctity that exhaled from his garments, and howled from their kennels as he passed.

Such was Fray Simon, the spiritual counsellor of the comely wife of Lope Sanchez ; and as the father confessor is the domestic confidant of women in humble life in Spain, he was soon acquainted, in great secrecy, with the story of the hidden treasure.

The friar opened his eyes and mouth and crossed him-

self a dozen times at the news. After a moment's pause, 'Daughter of my soul !' said he, 'know that thy husband has committed a double sin—a sin against both State and Church ! The treasure he hath thus seized upon for himself, being found in the royal domains, belongs of course to the crown ; but being infidel wealth, rescued as it were from the very fangs of Satan, should be devoted to the Church. Still, however, the matter may be accommodated. Bring hither thy myrtle wreath.'

When the good father beheld it, his eyes twinkled more than ever with admiration of the size and beauty of the emeralds. 'This,' said he, 'being the first-fruits of this discovery, should be dedicated to pious purposes. I will hang it up as a votive offering before the image of San Francisco in our chapel, and will earnestly pray to him, this very night, that your husband be permitted to remain in quiet possession of your wealth.'

The good dame was delighted to make her peace with Heaven at so cheap a rate, and the friar, putting the wreath under his mantle, departed with saintly steps towards his convent.

When Lope Sanchez came home, his wife told him what had passed. He was excessively provoked, for he lacked his wife's devotion, and had for some time groaned in secret at the domestic visitations of the friar. 'Woman,' said he, 'what hast thou done ? thou hast put everything at hazard by thy tattling.'

'What !' cried the good woman, 'would you forbid my disburdening my conscience to my confessor ?'

'No, wife ! confess as many of your own sins as you please ; but as to this money-digging, it is a sin of my own, and my conscience is very easy under the weight of it.'

There was no use, however, in complaining ; the secret was told, and, like water spilled on the sand, was not again to be gathered. Their only chance was that the friar would be discreet.

The next day, while Lope Sanchez was abroad, there was a humble knocking at the door, and Fray Simon entered with meek and demure countenance.

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• ‘Daughter,’ said he, ‘I have earnestly prayed to San Francisco, and he has heard my prayer. In the dead of the night the saint appeared to me in a dream, but with a frowning aspect. ‘Why,’ said he, ‘dost thou pray to me to dispense with this treasure of the Gentiles, when thou seest the poverty of my chapel? Go to the house of Lope Sanchez, crave in my name a portion of the Moorish gold, to furnish two candlesticks for the main altar, and let him possess the residue in peace.’

When the good woman heard of this vision, she crossed herself with awe, and, going to the secret place where Lope had hid the treasure, she filled a great leathern purse with pieces of Moorish gold, and gave it to the friar. The pious monk bestowed upon her, in return, benedictions enough, if paid by Heaven, to enrich her race to the latest posterity; then, slipping the purse into the sleeve of his habit, he folded his hands upon his breast, and departed with an air of humble thankfulness.

When Lope Sanchez heard of this second donation to the Church, he had wellnigh lost his senses. ‘Unfortunate man,’ cried he, ‘what will become of me? I shall be robbed by piecemeal; I shall be ruined and brought to beggary!’

It was with the utmost difficulty that his wife could pacify him by reminding him of the countless wealth that yet remained, and how considerate it was for San Francisco to rest contented with so small a portion.

Unluckily, Fray Simon had a number of poor relations to be provided for, not to mention some half-dozen sturdy, bullet-headed orphan children, and destitute foundlings that he had taken under his care. He repeated his visits, therefore, from day to day, with solicitations on behalf of Saint Dominick, Saint Andrew, Saint James, until poor Lope was driven to despair, and found that unless he got out of reach of this holy friar, he should have to make peace-offerings to every saint in the calendar. He determined, therefore, to pack up his remaining wealth, beat a secret retreat in the night, and make off to another part of the kingdom.

Full of this project, he bought a stout mule for the purpose and tethered it in a gloomy vault underneath the tower of the seven floors; the very place whence the Belludo, or goblin horse, is said to issue forth at midnight, and scour the streets of Granada, pursued by a pack of hell-hounds. Lope Sanchez had little faith in the story, but availed himself of the dread occasioned by it, knowing that no one would be likely to pry into the subterranean stable of the phantom steed. He sent off his family in the course of the day with orders to wait for him at a distant village of the Vega. As the night advanced, he conveyed his treasure to the vault under the tower, and, having loaded his mule, he led it forth, and cautiously descended the dusky avenue.

Honest Lope had taken his measures with the utmost secrecy, imparting them to no one but the faithful wife of his bosom. By some miraculous revelation, however, they became known to Fray Simon. The zealous friar beheld these infidel treasures on the point of slipping for ever out of his grasp, and determined to have one more dash at them for the benefit of the Church and San Francisco. Accordingly, when the bells had rung for *animas*, and all the Alhambra was quiet, he stole out of his convent, and, descending through the Gate of Justice, concealed himself among the thickets of roses and laurels that border the great avenue. Here he remained, counting the quarters of hours as they were sounded on the bell of the watch-tower, and listening to the dreary hootings of owls, and the distant barking of dogs from the gipsy caverns.

At length he heard the tramp of hoofs, and, through the gloom of the overshadowing trees, imperfectly beheld a steed descending the avenue. The sturdy friar chuckled at the idea of the knowing turn he was about to serve honest Lope.

Tucking up the skirts of his habit, and wriggling like a cat watching a mouse, he waited until his prey was directly before him, when, darting forth from his leafy covert, and putting one hand on the shoulder and the other on the crupper, he made a vault that would not

have disgraced the most experienced master of equitation, and alighted well-forked astride the steed. 'Ah ha !' said the sturdy friar, 'we shall now see who best understands the game.' He had scarce uttered the words when the mule began to kick, and rear, and plunge, and then set off full speed down the hill. The friar attempted to check him, but in vain. He bounded from rock to rock, and bush to bush ; the friar's habit was torn to ribbons and fluttered in the wind, his shaven poll received many a hard knock from the branches of the trees, and many a scratch from the brambles. To add to his terror and distress, he found a pack of seven hounds in full cry at his heels, and perceived, too late, that he was actually mounted upon the terrible Belludo !

Away then they went, according to the ancient phrase, 'pull devil, pull friar,' down the great avenue, across the Plaza Nueva, along the Zacatin, around the Vivarrambla—never did huntsman and hound make a more furious run, or more infernal uproar. In vain did the friar invoke every saint in the calendar, and the holy Virgin into the bargain ; every time he mentioned a name of the kind it was like a fresh application of the spur, and made the Belludo bound as high as a house. Through the remainder of the night was the unlucky Fray Simon carried hither and thither, and whither he would not, until every bone in his body ached, and he suffered a loss of leather too grievous to be mentioned. At length the crowing of a cock gave the signal of returning day. At the sound the goblin steed wheeled about, and galloped back for his tower. Again he scoured the Vivarrambla, the Zacatin, the Plaza Nueva, and the avenue of fountains, the seven dogs yelling, and barking, and leaping up, and snapping at the heels of the terrified friar. The first streak of day had just appeared as they reached the tower ; here the goblin steed kicked up his heels, sent the friar a somerset through the air, plunged into the dark vault followed by the infernal pack, and a profound silence succeeded to the late deafening clamour.

Was ever so diabolical a trick played off upon a holy friar ? A peasant going to his labours at early dawn

found the unfortunate Fray Simon lying under a fig-tree at the foot of the tower, but so bruised and bedevilled that he could neither speak nor move. He was conveyed with all care and tenderness to his cell, and the story went that he had been waylaid and maltreated by robbers. A day or two elapsed before he recovered the use of his limbs ; he consoled himself, in the meantime, with the thoughts that, though the mule with the treasure had escaped him, he had previously had some rare pickings at the infidel spoils. His first care, on being able to use his limbs, was to search beneath his pallet, where he had secreted the myrtle wreath and the leathern pouches of gold extracted from the piety of Dame Sanchez. What was his dismay at finding the wreath, in effect, but a withered branch of myrtle, and the leathern pouches filled with sand and gravel !

Fray Simon, with all his chagrin, had the discretion to hold his tongue, for to betray the secret might draw on him the ridicule of the public, and the punishment of his superior : it was not until many years afterwards, on his death-bed, that he revealed to his confessor his nocturnal ride on the Belludo.

Nothing was heard of Lope Sanchez for a long time after his disappearance from the Alhambra. His memory was always cherished as that of a merry companion, though it was feared, from the care and melancholy observed in his conduct shortly before his mysterious departure, that poverty and distress had driven him to some extremity. Some years afterwards one of his old companions, an invalid soldier, being at Malaga, was knocked down and nearly run over by a coach and six. The carriage stopped ; an old gentleman magnificently dressed, with a bag-wig and sword, stepped out to assist the poor invalid. What was the astonishment of the latter to behold in this grand cavalier his old friend Lope Sanchez, who was actually celebrating the marriage of his daughter Sanchica with one of the first grandees in the land !

The carriage contained the bridal party. There was Dame Sanchez, now grown as round as a barrel, and

dressed out with feathers and jewels, and necklaces of pearls, and necklaces of diamonds, and rings on every finger, altogether a finery of apparel that had not been since the days of Queen Sheba. The little Sanchica had now grown to be a woman, and for grace and beauty might have been mistaken for a duchess, if not a princess outright. The bridegroom sat beside her—rather a withered, spindle-shanked little man, but this only proved him to be of the true-blue blood; a legitimate Spanish grandee being rarely above three cubits in stature. The match had been of the mother's making.

Riches had not spoiled the heart of honest Lope. He kept his old comrade with him for several days; feasted him like a king, took him to plays and bull-fights, and at length sent him away rejoicing with a big bag of money for himself, and another to be distributed among his ancient messmates of the Alhambra.

Lope always gave out that a rich brother had died in America and left him heir to a copper mine; but the shrewd gossips of the Alhambra insist that his wealth was all derived from his having discovered the secret guarded by the two marble nymphs of the Alhambra. It is remarked that these very discreet statues continue, even unto the present day, with their eyes fixed most significantly on the same part of the wall; which leads many to suppose there is still some hidden treasure remaining there well worthy the attention of the enterprising traveller. Though others, and particularly all female visitors, regard them with great complacency as lasting monuments of the fact that women can keep a secret.

R. H. BARHAM

1788-1845

THE SPECTRE OF TAPPINGTON

'It is very odd, though; what can have become of them?' said Charles Seaforth, as he peeped under the valance of an old-fashioned bedstead, in an old-fashioned apartment of a still more old-fashioned manor-house; 'tis confoundedly odd, and I can't make it out at all. Why, Barney, where are they?—and where the d—l are you?'

No answer was returned to this appeal; and the lieutenant, who was, in the main, a reasonable person,—at least as reasonable a person as any young gentleman of twenty-two in 'the service' can fairly be expected to be,—cooled when he reflected that his servant could scarcely reply extempore to a summons which it was impossible he should hear.

An application to the bell was the considerate result; and the footsteps of as tight a lad as ever put pipe-clay to belt sounded along the gallery.

'Come in!' said his master. An ineffectual attempt upon the door reminded Mr. Seaforth that he had locked himself in. 'By Heaven! this is the oddest thing of all,' said he, as he turned the key and admitted Mr. Maguire into his dormitory.

'Barney, where are my pantaloons?'

'Is it the breeches?' asked the valet, casting an inquiring eye round the apartment;—'is it the breeches, sir?'

'Yes; what have you done with them?'

‘Sure then your honour had them on when you went to bed, and it’s hereabout they’ll be, I’ll be bail’; and Barney lifted a fashionable tunic from a cane-backed arm-chair, proceeding in his examination. But the search was vain: there was the tunic aforesaid; there was a smart-looking kerseymere waistcoat; but the most important article of all in a gentleman’s wardrobe was still wanting.

‘Where *can* they be?’ asked the master, with a strong accent on the auxiliary verb.

‘Sorra a know I knows,’ said the man.

‘It *must* have been the devil, then, after all, who has been here and carried them off!’ cried Seaforth, staring full into Barney’s face.

Mr. Maguire was not devoid of the superstition of his countrymen, still he looked as if he did not quite subscribe to the *sequitur*.

His master read incredulity in his countenance. ‘Why, I tell you, Barney, I put them there, on that arm-chair, when I got into bed; and, by Heaven! I distinctly saw the ghost of the old fellow they told me of, come in at midnight, put on my pantaloons, and walk away with them.’

‘May be so,’ was the cautious reply.

‘I thought, of course, it was a dream; but then—where the d—l are the breeches?’

The question was more easily asked than answered. Barney renewed his search, while the lieutenant folded his arms, and, leaning against the toilet, sunk into a reverie.

‘After all, it must be some trick of my laughter-loving cousins,’ said Seaforth.

‘Ah! then, the ladies!’ chimed in Mr. Maguire, though the observation was not addressed to him; ‘and will it be Miss Caroline, or Miss Fanny, that’s stole your honour’s things?’

‘I hardly know what to think of it,’ pursued the bereaved lieutenant, still speaking in soliloquy, with his eye resting dubiously on the chamber-door. ‘I looked myself in, that’s certain; and—but there must be some

other entrance to the room—pooh! I remember—the private staircase; how could I be such a fool?’ and he crossed the chamber to where a low oaken doorcase was dimly visible in a distant corner. He paused before it. Nothing now interfered to screen it from observation; but it bore tokens of having been at some earlier period concealed by tapestry, remains of which yet clothed the walls on either side of the portal.

‘This way they must have come,’ said Seaforth; ‘I wish with all my heart I had caught them!’

‘Och! the kittens!’ sighed Mr. Barney Maguire.

But the mystery was yet as far from being solved as before. True, there *was* the ‘other door’; but then that, too, on examination, was even more firmly secured than the one which opened on the gallery,—two heavy bolts on the inside effectually prevented any *coup de main* on the lieutenant’s *bivouac* from that quarter. He was more puzzled than ever; nor did the minutest inspection of the walls and floor throw any light upon the subject: one thing only was clear,—the breeches were gone! ‘It is *very* singular,’ said the lieutenant.

Tappington (generally called Tapton) Everard is an antiquated but commodious manor-house in the eastern division of the county of Kent. A former proprietor had been High-sheriff in the days of Elizabeth, and many a dark and dismal tradition was yet extant of the licentiousness of his life, and the enormity of his offences. The Glen, which the keeper’s daughter was seen to enter, but never known to quit, still frowns darkly as of yore; while an ineradicable bloodstain on the oaken stair yet bids defiance to the united energies of soap and sand. But it is with one particular apartment that a deed of more especial atrocity is said to be connected. A stranger guest—so runs the legend—arrived unexpectedly at the mansion of the ‘Bad Sir Giles.’ They met in apparent friendship; but the ill-concealed scowl on their master’s brow told the domestics that the visit was not a welcome one; the banquet, however, was not spared; the wine-cup circulated freely,—too freely, perhaps,—

for sounds of discord at length reached the ears of even the excluded serving-men, as they were doing their best to imitate their betters in the lower hall. Alarmed, some of them ventured to approach the parlour; one, an old and favoured retainer of the house, went so far as to break in upon his master's privacy. Sir Giles, already high in oath, fiercely enjoined his absence, and he retired; not, however, before he had distinctly heard from the stranger's lips a menace that 'There was that within his pocket which could disprove the knight's right to issue that or any other command within the walls of Tapton.'

The intrusion, though momentary, seemed to have produced a beneficial effect; the voices of the disputants fell, and the conversation was carried on thenceforth in a more subdued tone, till, as evening closed in, the domestics, when summoned to attend with lights, found not only cordiality restored, but that a still deeper carouse was meditated. Fresh stoups, and from the choicest bins, were produced; nor was it till at a late, or rather early hour, that the revellers sought their chambers.

The one allotted to the stranger occupied the first floor of the eastern angle of the building, and had once been the favourite apartment of Sir Giles himself. Scandal ascribed this preference to the facility which a private staircase, communicating with the grounds, had afforded him, in the old knight's time, of following his wicked courses unchecked by parental observation; a consideration which ceased to be of weight when the death of his father left him uncontrolled master of his estate and actions. From that period Sir Giles had established himself in what were called the 'state apartments,' and the 'oaken chamber' was rarely tenanted, save on occasions of extraordinary festivity, or when the yule-log drew an unusually large accession of guests around the Christmas hearth.

On this eventful night it was prepared for the unknown visitor, who sought his couch heated and inflamed from his midnight orgies, and in the morning was found in his bed a swollen and blackened corpse. No marks of vio-

lence appeared upon the body ; but the livid hue of the lips, and certain dark-coloured spots visible on the skin, aroused suspicions which those who entertained them were too timid to express. Apoplexy, induced by the excesses of the preceding night, Sir Giles's confidential leech pronounced to be the cause of his sudden dissolution. The body was buried in peace ; and though some shook their heads as they witnessed the haste with which the funeral rites were hurried on, none ventured to murmur. Other events arose to distract the attention of the retainers ; men's minds became occupied by the stirring politics of the day ; while the near approach of that formidable armada, so vainly arrogating to itself a title which the very elements joined with human valour to disprove, soon interfered to weaken, if not obliterate, all remembrance of the nameless stranger who had died within the walls of Tapton Everard.

Years rolled on : the ' Bad Sir Giles ' had himself long since gone to his account, the last, as it was believed, of his immediate line ; though a few of the older tenants were sometimes heard to speak of an elder brother, who had disappeared in early life, and never inherited the estate. Rumours, too, of his having left a son in foreign lands were at one time rife ; but they died away, nothing occurring to support them : the property passed unchallenged to a collateral branch of the family, and the secret, if secret there were, was buried in Denton churchyard, in the lonely grave of the mysterious stranger. One circumstance alone occurred, after a long-intervening period, to revive the memory of these transactions. Some workmen employed in grubbing an old plantation, for the purpose of raising on its site a modern shrubbery, dug up, in the execution of their task, the mildewed remnants of what seemed to have been once a garment. On more minute inspection enough remained of silken slashes and a coarse embroidery to identify the relics as having once formed part of a pair of trunk hose ; while a few papers which fell from them, altogether illegible from damp and age, were by the unlearned rustics conveyed to the then owner of the estate.

Whether the squire was more successful in deciphering them was never known ; he certainly never alluded to their contents ; and little would have been thought of the matter but for the inconvenient memory of one old woman, who declared she heard her grandfather say that when the 'stranger guest' was poisoned, though all the rest of his clothes were there, his breeches, the supposed repository of the supposed documents, could never be found. The master of Tapton Everard smiled when he heard Dame Jones's hint of deeds which might impeach the validity of his own title in favour of some unknown descendant of some unknown heir ; and the story was rarely alluded to, save by one or two miracle-mongers, who had heard that others had seen the ghost of old Sir Giles, in his night-cap, issue from the postern, enter the adjoining copse, and wring his shadowy hands in agony, as he seemed to search vainly for something hidden among the evergreens. The stranger's death-room had, of course, been occasionally haunted from the time of his decease ; but the periods of visitation had latterly become very rare—even Mrs. Botherby, the housekeeper, being forced to admit that, during her long sojourn at the manor, she had never 'met with anything worse than herself' ; though, as the old lady afterwards added upon more mature reflection, 'I must say I think I saw the devil *once*.'

Such was the legend attached to Tapton Everard, and such the story which the lively Caroline Ingoldsby detailed to her equally mercurial cousin, Charles Seaforth, lieutenant in the Hon. East India Company's second regiment of Bombay Fencibles, as arm-in-arm they promenaded a gallery decked with some dozen grim-looking ancestral portraits, and, among others, with that of the redoubted Sir Giles himself. The gallant commander had that very morning paid his first visit to the house of his maternal uncle, after an absence of several years passed with his regiment on the arid plains of Hindostan, whence he was now returned on a three years' furlough. He had gone out a boy,—he returned a man ; but the impression made upon his youthful fancy by his

favourite cousin remained unimpaired, and to Tapton he directed his steps, even before he sought the home of his widowed mother,—comforting himself in this breach of filial decorum by the reflection that, as the manor was so little out of his way, it would be unkind to pass, as it were, the door of his relatives without just looking in for a few hours.

But he found his uncle as hospitable, and his cousin more charming than ever; and the looks of one, and the requests of the other, soon precluded the possibility of refusing to lengthen the 'few hours' into a few days, though the house was at the moment full of visitors.

The Peterses were there from Ramsgate; and Mr., Mrs., and the two Miss Simpkinsons, from Bath, had come to pass a month with the family; and Tom Ingoldsby had brought down his college friend the Honourable Augustus Sucklethumbkin, with his groom and pointers, to take a fortnight's shooting. And then there was Mrs. Ogleton, the rich young widow, with her large black eyes, who, people did say, was setting her cap at the young squire, though Mrs. Botherby did not believe it; and, above all, there was Mademoiselle Pauline, her *femme de chambre*, who '*mon-Dieu'd*' everything and everybody, and cried '*Quel horreur!*' at Mrs. Botherby's cap. In short, to use the last-named and much-respected lady's own expression, the house was 'choke-full' to the very attics,—all save the 'oaken chamber,' which, as the lieutenant expressed a most magnanimous disregard of ghosts, was forthwith appropriated to his particular accommodation. Mr. Maguire meanwhile was fain to share the apartment of Oliver Dobbs, the squire's own man.

'Come, Charles, the urn is absolutely getting cold; your breakfast will be quite spoiled: what can have made you so idle?' Such was the morning salutation of Miss Ingoldsby to the *militaire* as he entered the breakfast-room half an hour after the latest of the party.

‘A pretty gentleman, truly, to make an appointment with,’ chimed in Miss Frances. ‘What is become of our ramble to the rocks before breakfast?’

‘Oh! the young men never think of keeping a promise now,’ said Mrs. Peters, a little ferret-faced woman with underdone eyes.

‘When I was a young man,’ said Mr. Peters, ‘I remember I always made a point of——’

‘Pray how long ago was that?’ asked Mr. Simpkinson from Bath.

‘Why, sir, when I married Mrs. Peters, I was—let me see—I was——’

‘Do pray hold your tongue, P., and eat your breakfast!’ interrupted his better half, who had a mortal horror of chronological references; ‘it’s very rude to tease people with your family affairs.’

The lieutenant had by this time taken his seat in silence,—a good-humoured nod, and a glance, half-smiling, half-inquisitive, being the extent of his salutation. Smitten as he was, and in the immediate presence of her who had made so large a hole in his heart, his manner was evidently *distract*, which the fair Caroline in her secret soul attributed to his being solely occupied by her *agréments*: how would she have bridled had she known that they only shared his meditations with a pair of breeches!

Charles drank his coffee and spiked some half-dozen eggs, darting occasionally a penetrating glance at the ladies, in hope of detecting the supposed waggery by the evidence of some furtive smile or conscious look. But in vain; not a dimple moved indicative of roguery, nor did the slightest elevation of eyebrow rise confirmative of his suspicions. Hints and insinuations passed unheeded,—more particular inquiries were out of the question:—the subject was unapproachable.

In the meantime, ‘patent cords’ were just the thing for a morning’s ride; and, breakfast ended, away cantered the party over the downs, till, every faculty absorbed by the beauties, animate and inanimate, which surrounded him, Lieutenant Seaforth of the Bombay

Fencibles bestowed no more thought upon his breeches than if he had been born on the top of Ben Lomond.

Another night had passed away; the sun rose brilliantly, forming with his level beams a splendid rainbow in the far-off west, whither the heavy cloud, which for the last two hours had been pouring its waters on the earth, was now flying before him.

'Ah! then, and it's little good it'll be the claning of ye,' apostrophized Mr. Barney Maguire, as he deposited, in front of his master's toilet, a pair of 'bran new' jockey boots, one of Hoby's primest fits, which the lieutenant had purchased in his way through town. On that very morning had they come for the first time under the valet's depurating hand, so little soiled, indeed, from the turfy ride of the preceding day, that a less scrupulous domestic might, perhaps, have considered the application of 'Warren's Matchless,' or oxalic acid, altogether superfluous. Not so Barney: with the nicest care had he removed the slightest impurity from each polished surface, and there they stood, rejoicing in their sable radiance. No wonder a pang shot across Mr. Maguire's breast, as he thought on the work now cut out for them, so different from the light labours of the day before; no wonder he murmured with a sigh, as the scarce dried window-panes disclosed a road now inch-deep in mud, 'Ah! then, it's little good the claning of ye!'—for well had he learned in the hall below that eight miles of a stiff clay soil lay between the manor and Bolsover Abbey, whose picturesque ruins,

'Like ancient Rome, majestic in decay,'

the party had determined to explore. The master had already commenced dressing, and the man was fitting straps upon a light pair of crane-necked spurs, when his hand was arrested by the old question,—'Barney, where are the breeches?'

They were nowhere to be found!

Mr. Seaforth descended that morning, whip in hand,

and equipped in a handsome green riding-frock, but no 'breeches and boots to match' were there: loose jean trousers, surmounting a pair of diminutive Wellingtons, embraced, somewhat incongruously, his nether man, *vice* the 'patent cords,' returned, like yesterday's pantaloons, absent without leave. The 'top-boots' had a holiday.

'A fine morning after the rain,' said Mr. Simpkinson from Bath.

'Just the thing for the 'ops,' said Mr. Peters. 'I remember when I was a boy——'

'Do hold your tongue, P.,' said Mrs. Peters,—advice which that exemplary matron was in the constant habit of administering to 'her P.' as she called him, whenever he prepared to vent his reminiscences. Her precise reason for this it would be difficult to determine, unless, indeed, the story be true which a little bird had whispered into Mrs. Botherby's ear,—Mr. Peters, though now a wealthy man, had received a liberal education at a charity-school, and was apt to recur to the days of his muffin-cap and leathers. As usual, he took his wife's hint in good part, and 'paused in his reply.'

'A glorious day for the ruins!' said young Ingoldsby. 'But, Charles, what the deuce are you about? you don't mean to ride through our lanes in such toggerly as that?'

'Lassy me!' said Miss Julia Simpkinson, 'won't you be very wet?'

'You had better take Tom's cab,' quoth the squire.

But this proposition was at once overruled; Mrs. Ogleton had already nailed the cab, a vehicle of all others the best adapted for a snug flirtation.

'Or drive Miss Julia in the phaeton?' No; that was the post of Mr. Peters, who, indifferent as an equestrian, had acquired some fame as a whip while travelling through the midland counties for the firm of Bagshaw, Snivelby & Ghymes.

'Thank you, I shall ride with my cousins,' said Charles, with as much *nonchalance* as he could assume—and he did so; Mr. Ingoldsby, Mrs. Peters, Mr. Simpkinson from Bath, and his eldest daughter with her *album*, following in

the family coach. The gentleman-commoner 'voted the affair d—d slow,' and declined the party altogether in favour of the gamekeeper and a cigar. 'There was "no fun" in looking at old houses!' Mrs. Simpkinson preferred a short *séjour* in the still-room with Mrs. Botherby, who had promised to initiate her in that grand *arcanum*, the transmutation of gooseberry jam into Guava jelly.

'Did you ever see an old abbey before, Mr. Peters?'

'Yes, miss, a French one; we have got one at Rams-gate; he teaches the Miss Joneses to parley-voo, and is turned of sixty.'

Miss Simpkinson closed her album with an air of ineffable disdain.

Mr. Simpkinson from Bath was a professed antiquary, and one of the first water; he was master of Gwillim's Heraldry, and Milles's History of the Crusades; knew every plate in the Monasticon; had written an essay on the origin and dignity of the office of overseer, and settled the date of a Queen Anne's farthing. An influential member of the Antiquarian Society, to whose 'Beauties of Bagnigge Wells' he had been a liberal subscriber, procured him a seat at the board of that learned body, since which happy epoch Sylvanus Urban had not a more indefatigable correspondent. His inaugural essay on the President's cocked hat was considered a miracle of erudition: and his account of the earliest application of gilding to gingerbread, a masterpiece of antiquarian research. His eldest daughter was of a kindred spirit; if her father's mantle had not fallen upon her, it was only because he had not thrown it off himself; she had caught hold of its tail, however, while it yet hung upon his honoured shoulders. To souls so congenial, what a sight was the magnificent ruin of Bolsover! its broken arches, its mouldering pinnacles, and the airy tracery of its half-demolished windows. The party were in raptures; Mr. Simpkinson began to meditate an essay, and his daughter an ode: even Seaforth, as he gazed on these lonely relics of the olden time, was betrayed into a momentary for-

getfulness of his love and losses : the widow's eye-glass turned from her *cicisbeo's* whiskers to the mantling ivy : Mrs. Peters wiped her spectacles ; and ' her P. ' supposed the central tower ' had once been the county jail. ' The squire was a philosopher, and had been there often before, so he ordered out the cold tongue and chickens.

' Bolsover Priory, ' said Mr. Simpkinson, with the air of a connoisseur,—' Bolsover Priory was founded in the reign of Henry the Sixth, about the beginning of the eleventh century. Hugh de Bolsover had accompanied that monarch to the Holy Land, in the expedition undertaken by way of penance for the murder of his young nephews in the Tower. Upon the dissolution of the monasteries, the veteran was enfeoffed in the lands and manor, to which he gave his own name of Bowlsover, or Bee-owls-over, (by corruption Bolsover,)—a Bee in chief, over three Owls, all proper, being the armorial ensigns borne by this distinguished crusader at the siege of Acre.'

' Ah ! that was Sir Sidney Smith, ' said Mr. Peters ; ' I've heard tell of him, and all about Mrs. Partington, and——'

' P., be quiet, and don't expose yourself ! ' sharply interrupted his lady. P. was silenced, and betook himself to the bottled stout.

' These lands, ' continued the antiquary, ' were held in grand serjeantry by the presentation of three white owls and a pot of honey——'

' Lassy me ! how nice ! ' said Miss Julia. Mr. Peters licked his lips.

' Pray give me leave, my dear—owls and honey, whenever the king should come a rat-catching into this part of the country.'

' Rat-catching ! ' ejaculated the squire, pausing abruptly in the mastication of a drumstick.

' To be sure, my dear sir : don't you remember the rats once came under the forest laws—a minor species of venison ? " Rats and mice, and such small deer, " eh ?—Shakespeare, you know. Our ancestors ate rats ; (" The nasty fellows ! " shuddered Miss Julia in a parenthesis ;) and owls, you know, are capital mousers——'

'I've seen a howl,' said Mr. Peters; 'there's one in the Sohological Gardens,—a little hook-nosed chap in a wig,—only its feathers and ——'

Poor P. was destined never to finish a speech.

'Do be quiet!' cried the authoritative voice; and the would-be naturalist shrank into his shell, like a snail in the 'Sohological Gardens.'

'You should read Blount's Jocular Tenures, Mr. Ingoldsby,' pursued Simpkinson. 'A learned man was Blount! Why, sir, His Royal Highness the Duke of York once paid a silver horse-shoe to Lord Ferrers——'

'I've heard of him,' broke in the incorrigible Peters; 'he was hanged at the Old Bailey in a silk rope for shooting Dr. Johnson.'

The antiquary vouchsafed no notice of the interruption; but, taking a pinch of snuff, continued his harangue.

'A silver horse-shoe, sir, which is due from every scion of royalty who rides across one of his manors; and if you look into the penny county histories, now publishing by an eminent friend of mine, you will find that Langhale in Co. Norf. was held by one Baldwin *per saltum, sufflatum, et pettum*; that is, he was to come every Christmas into Westminster Hall, there to take a leap, cry hem! and——'

'Mr. Simpkinson, a glass of sherry?' cried Tom Ingoldsby, hastily.

'Not any, thank you, sir. This Baldwin, surnamed Le——'

'Mrs. Oggleton challenges you, sir; she insists upon it,' said Tom still more rapidly, at the same time filling a glass, and forcing it on the *scavant*, who, thus arrested in the very crisis of his narrative, received and swallowed the potation as if it had been physic.

'What on earth has Miss Simpkinson discovered there?' continued Tom; 'something of interest. See how fast she is writing.'

The diversion was effectual; every one looked towards Miss Simpkinson, who, far too ethereal for 'creature comforts,' was seated apart on the dilapidated remains of an altar-tomb, committing eagerly to paper

Something that had strongly impressed her ; the air,—the eye in a ‘ fine frenzy rolling,’—all betokened that the divine *afflatus* was come. Her father rose, and stole silently towards her.

‘ What an old boar ! ’ muttered young Ingoldsby ; alluding, perhaps, to a slice of brawn which he had just begun to operate upon, but which, from the celerity with which it disappeared, did not seem so very difficult of mastication.

But what had become of Seaforth and his fair Caroline all this while ? Why, it so happened that they had been simultaneously stricken with the picturesque appearance of one of those high and pointed arches, which that eminent antiquary, Mr. Horseley Curties, has described in his Ancient Records as ‘ a *Gothic* window of the *Saxon* order ’ ; and then the ivy clustered so thickly and so beautifully on the other side, that they went round to look at that ; and then their proximity deprived it of half its effect, and so they walked across to a little knoll, a hundred yards off, and in crossing a small ravine they came to what in Ireland they call ‘ a bad step,’ and Charles had to carry his cousin over it ; and then, when they had to come back, she would not give him the trouble again for the world, so they followed a better but more circuitous route, and there were hedges and ditches in the way, and stiles to get over and gates to get through, so that an hour or more had elapsed before they were able to rejoin the party.

‘ Lassy me ! ’ said Miss Julia Simpkinson, ‘ how long you have been gone ! ’

And so they had. The remark was a very just as well as a very natural one. They were gone a long while, and a nice cosy chat they had ; and what do you think it was all about, my dear miss ?

‘ O, lassy me ! love, no doubt, and the moon, and eyes, and nightingales, and—— ’

Stay, stay, my sweet young lady ; do not let the fervour of your feelings run away with you ! I do not pretend to say, indeed, that one or more of these pretty subjects might not have been introduced ; but the most impor-

tant and leading topic of the conference was—Lieutenant Seaforth's breeches.

'Caroline,' said Charles, 'I have had some very odd dreams since I have been at Tappington.'

'Dreams, have you?' smiled the young lady, arching her taper neck like a swan in pluming. 'Dreams, have you?'

'Aye, dreams,—or dream, perhaps, I should say; for, though repeated, it was still the same. And what do you imagine was its subject?'

'It is impossible for me to divine,' said the tongue;—'I have not the least difficulty in guessing,' said the eye, as plainly as ever eye spoke.

'I dreamt—of your great grandfather!'

There was a change in the glance—'My great grandfather?'

'Yes, the old Sir Giles, or Sir John, you told me about the other day: he walked into my bedroom in his short cloak of murrey-coloured velvet, his long rapier, and his Raleigh-looking hat and feather, just as the picture represents him; but with one exception.'

'And what was that?'

'Why, his lower extremities, which were visible, were—those of a skeleton.'

'Well.'

'Well, after taking a turn or two about the room, and looking round him with a wistful air, he came to the bed's foot, stared at me in a manner impossible to describe,—and then he—he laid hold of my pantaloons; whipped his long bony legs into them in a twinkling; and strutting up to the glass, seemed to view himself in it with great complacency. I tried to speak, but in vain. The effort, however, seemed to excite his attention; for, wheeling about, he showed me the grimmest-looking death's head you can well imagine, and with an indescribable grin strutted out of the room.'

'Absurd! Charles. How can you talk such nonsense?'

'But, Caroline,—the breeches are really gone.'

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On the following morning, contrary to his usual custom, Seaforth was the first person in the breakfast-parlour. As no one else was present, he did precisely what nine young men out of ten so situated would have done; he walked up to the mantelpiece, established himself upon the rug, and subducting his coat-tails one under each arm, turned towards the fire that portion of the human frame which it is considered equally indecorous to present to a friend or an enemy. A serious, not to say anxious, expression was visible upon his good-humoured countenance, and his mouth was fast buttoning itself up for an incipient whistle, when little Flo, a tiny spaniel of the Blenheim breed,—the pet object of Miss Julia Simpkinson's affections,—bounced out from beneath a sofa, and began to bark at—his pantaloons.

They were cleverly 'built,' of a light grey mixture, a broad stripe of the most vivid scarlet traversing each seam in a perpendicular direction from hip to ankle,—in short, the regimental costume of the Royal Bombay Fencibles. The animal, educated in the country, had never seen such a pair of breeches in her life—*Omne ignotum pro magnifico!* The scarlet streak, inflamed as it was by the reflection of the fire, seemed to act on Flora's nerves as the same colour does on those of bulls and turkeys; she advanced at the *pas de charge*, and her vociferation, like her amazement, was unbounded. A sound kick from the disgusted officer changed its character, and induced a retreat at the very moment when the mistress of the pugnacious quadruped entered to the rescue.

'Lassy me! Flo, what is the matter?' cried the sympathizing lady, with a scrutinizing glance levelled at the gentleman.

It might as well have lighted on a feather bed. His air of imperturbable unconsciousness defied examination; and as he would not, and Flora could not, expound, that injured individual was compelled to pocket up her wrongs. Others of the household soon dropped in, and clustered round the board dedicated to the most sociable of meals; the urn was paraded 'hissing hot.' and the

cups which 'cheer, but not inebriate,' steamed redolent of hyson and pekoe; muffins and marmalade, newspapers and Finnon haddies, left little room for observation on the character of Charles's warlike 'turn-out.' At length a look from Caroline, followed by a smile that nearly ripened to a titter, caused him to turn abruptly and address his neighbour. It was Miss Simpkinson, who, deeply engaged in sipping her tea and turning over her album, seemed, like a female Chrononothologos, 'immersed in cogibundity of cogitation.' An interrogatory on the subject of her studies drew from her the confession that she was at that moment employed in putting the finishing touches to a poem inspired by the romantic shades of Bolsover. The entreaties of the company were of course urgent. Mr. Peters, 'who liked verses,' was especially persevering, and Sappho at length compliant. After a preparatory hem! and a glance at the mirror to ascertain that her look was sufficiently sentimental, the poetess began:—

'There is a calm, a holy feeling,
Vulgar minds can never know,
O'er the bosom softly stealing,—
Chasten'd grief, delicious woe!
Oh! how sweet at eve regaining
Yon lone tower's sequester'd shade—
Sadly mute and uncomplaining—'

—Yow!—yeough!—yeough!—yow!—yow! yelled a hapless sufferer from beneath the table.—It was an unlucky hour for quadrupeds; and if 'every dog will have his day,' he could not have selected a more unpropitious one than this. Mrs. Ogleton, too, had a pet,—a favourite pug,—whose squab figure, black muzzle, and tortuosity of tail, that curled like a head of celery in a salad-bowl, bespoke his Dutch extraction. Yow! yow! yow! continued the brute,—a chorus in which Flo instantly joined. Sooth to say, pug had more reason to express his dissatisfaction than was given him by the muse of Simpkinson; the other only barked for company. Scarcely had the poetess got through her first stanza when Tom Ingoldsby, in the enthusiasm of the moment, became so

lost in the material world, that, in his abstraction, he unwarily laid his hand on the cock of the urn. Quivering with emotion he gave it such an unlucky twist that the full stream of its scalding contents descended on the gingerbread hide of the unlucky Cupid.—The confusion was complete;—the whole economy of the table disarranged;—the company broke up in most admired disorder;—and ‘vulgar minds will never know’ anything more of Miss Simpkinson’s ode till they peruse it in some forthcoming Annual.

Seaforth profited by the confusion to take the delinquent who had caused this ‘stramash’ by the arm, and to lead him to the lawn, where he had a word or two for his private ear. The conference between the young gentlemen was neither brief in its duration nor unimportant in its result. The subject was what the lawyers call tripartite, embracing the information that Charles Seaforth was over head and ears in love with Tom Ingoldsby’s sister; secondly, that the lady had referred him to ‘papa’ for his sanction; thirdly and lastly, his nightly visitations, and consequent bereavement. At the two first items Tom smiled auspiciously;—at the last he burst out into an absolute ‘guffaw.’

‘Steal your breeches! Miss Bailey over again, by Jove,’ shouted Ingoldsby. ‘But a gentleman, you say,—and Sir Giles too. I am not sure, Charles, whether I ought not to call you out for aspersing the honour of the family.’

‘Laugh as you will, Tom,—be as incredulous as you please. One fact is incontestable,—the breeches are gone! Look here—I am reduced to my regimentals; and if these go, to-morrow I must borrow of you!’

Rochefoucault says, there is something in the misfortunes of our very best friends that does not displease us; assuredly we can, most of us, laugh at their petty inconveniences, till called upon to supply them. Tom composed his features on the instant, and replied with more gravity, as well as with an expletive, which, if my Lord Mayor had been within hearing, might have cost him five shillings.

'There is something very queer in this, after all. The clothes, you say, have positively disappeared. Somebody is playing you a trick; and, ten to one, your servant has a hand in it. By the way, I heard something yesterday of his kicking up a bobbery in the kitchen, and seeing a ghost, or something of that kind, himself. Depend upon it, Barney is in the plot.'

It now struck the lieutenant at once that the usually buoyant spirits of his attendant had of late been materially sobered down, his loquacity obviously circumscribed, and that he, the said lieutenant, had actually rung his bell three several times that very morning before he could procure his attendance. Mr. Maguire was forthwith summoned, and underwent a close examination. The 'bobbery' was easily explained. Mr. Oliver Dobbs had hinted his disapprobation of a flirtation carrying on between the gentleman from Munster and the lady from the Rue St. Honoré. Mademoiselle had boxed Mr. Maguire's ears, and Mr. Maguire had pulled Mademoiselle upon his knee, and the lady had *not* cried *Mon Dieu*! And Mr. Oliver Dobbs said it was very wrong; and Mrs. Botherby said it was 'scandalous,' and what ought not to be done in any moral kitchen; and Mr. Maguire had got hold of the Honourable Augustus Sucklethumbkin's powder-flask, and had put large pinches of the best Double Dartford into Mr. Dobbs's tobacco-box; and Mr. Dobbs's pipe had exploded, and set fire to Mrs. Botherby's Sunday cap; and Mr. Maguire had put it out with the slop-basin, 'barring the wig'; and then they were all so 'cantankerous,' that Barney had gone to take a walk in the garden; and then—then Mr. Barney had seen a ghost!

'A what? you blockhead!' asked Tom Ingoldsby.

'Sure then, and it's meself will tell your honour the rights of it,' said the ghost-seer. 'Meself and Miss Pauline, sir,—or Miss Pauline and meself, for the ladies comes first anyhow,—we got tired of the hobstroppylous skrimmaging among the ould servants, that didn't know a joke when they seen one: and we went out to look at the comet,—that's the rorybory-alehouse, they calls him

in this country,—and we walked upon the lawn,—and divil of any alehouse there was there at all; and Miss Pauline said it was becace of the shrubbery maybe, and why wouldn't we see it better beyonst the trees? and so we went to the trees, but sorrow a comet did meself see there, barring a big ghost instead of it.'

'A ghost? And what sort of a ghost, Barney?'

'Och, then, divil a lie I'll tell your honour. A tall ould gentleman he was, all in white, with a shovel on the shoulder of him, and a big torch in his fist,—though what he wanted with that it's meself can't tell, for his eyes were like gig-lamps, let alone the moon and the comet, which wasn't there at all:—and "Barney," says he to me,—'cause why he knew me,—"Barney," says he, "what is it you're doing with the *colleen* there, Barney?"—Divil a word did I say. Miss Pauline screeched, and cried murther in French, and ran off with herself; and of course meself was in a mighty hurry after the lady, and had no time to stop palavering with him any way: so I dispersed at once, and the ghost vanished in a flame of fire!'

Mr. Maguire's account was received with avowed incredulity by both gentlemen; but Barney stuck to his text with unflinching pertinacity. A reference to *Made-moiselle* was suggested, but abandoned, as neither party had a taste for delicate investigations.

'I'll tell you what, Seaforth,' said Ingoldsby, after Barney had received his dismissal, 'that there is a trick here, is evident; and Barney's vision may possibly be a part of it. Whether he is most knave or fool, you best know. At all events, I will sit up with you to-night, and see if I can convert my ancestor into a visiting acquaintance. Meanwhile your finger on your lip!'

'Twas now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn, and graves give up their dead.'

Gladly would I grace my tale with decent horror, and therefore I do beseech the 'gentle reader' to believe that if all the *succedanea* to this mysterious narrative are not

in strict keeping, he will ascribe it only to the disgraceful innovations of modern degeneracy upon the sober and dignified habits of our ancestors. I can introduce him, it is true, into an old and high-roofed chamber, its walls covered on three sides with black oak wainscoting, adorned with carvings of fruit and flowers long anterior to those of Grinling Gibbons ; the fourth side is clothed with a curious remnant of dingy tapestry, once elucidatory of some Scriptural history, but of *which* not even Mrs. Botherby could determine. Mr. Simpkinson, who had examined it carefully, inclined to believe the principal figure to be either Bathsheba, or Daniel in the lions' den ; while Tom Ingoldsby decided in favour of the King of Bashan. All, however, was conjecture, tradition being silent on the subject. A lofty arched portal led into, and a little arched portal led out of, this apartment ; they were opposite each other, and each possessed the security of massy bolts on its interior. The bedstead, too, was not one of yesterday, but manifestly coeval with days ere Seddons was, and when a good four-post 'article' was deemed worthy of being a royal bequest. The bed itself, with all the appurtenances of palliasses, mattresses, &c., was of far later date, and looked most incongruously comfortable ; the casements, too, with their little diamond-shaped panes and iron binding, had given way to the modern heterodoxy of the sash-window. Nor was this all that conspired to ruin the costume, and render the room a meet haunt for such 'mixed spirits' only as could condescend to don at the same time an Elizabethan doublet and Bond Street inexpressibles.

With their green morocco slippers on a modern fender, in front of a disgracefully modern grate, sat two young gentlemen, clad in 'shawl-pattern' dressing-gowns and black silk stocks, much at variance with the high cane-backed chairs which supported them. A bunch of abomination, called a cigar, reeked in the left-hand corner of the mouth of one, and in the right-hand corner of the mouth of the other ;—an arrangement happily adapted for the escape of the noxious fumes up the chimney, without that unmerciful 'funking' other,

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which a less scientific disposition of the weed would have induced. A small pembroke table filled up the intervening space between them, sustaining, at each extremity, an elbow and a glass of toddy;—thus in ‘lonely pensive contemplation’ were the two worthies occupied, when the ‘iron tongue of midnight had tolled twelve.’

‘Ghost-time’s come!’ said Ingoldsby, taking from his waistcoat pocket a watch like a gold half-crown, and consulting it as though he suspected the turret-clock over the stables of mendacity.

‘Hush!’ said Charles; ‘did I not hear a footstep?’

There was a pause:—there *was* a footstep—it sounded distinctly—it reached the door—it hesitated, stopped, and—passed on.

Tom darted across the room, threw open the door, and became aware of Mrs. Botherby toddling to her chamber, at the other end of the gallery, after dosing one of the housemaids with an approved julep from the Countess of Kent’s ‘Choice Manual.’

‘Good night, sir!’ said Mrs. Botherby.

‘Go to the d—l!’ said the disappointed ghost-hunter.

An hour—two—rolled on, and still no spectral visitation; nor did aught intervene to make night hideous; and when the turret-clock sounded at length the hour of three, Ingoldsby, whose patience and grog were alike exhausted, sprang from his chair, saying—

‘This is all infernal nonsense, my good fellow. Deuce of any ghost shall we see to-night; it’s long past the canonical hour. I’m off to bed; and as to your breeches, I’ll insure them for the next twenty-four hours at least, at the price of the buckram.’

‘Certainly.—Oh! thank’ee; to be sure!’ stammered Charles, rousing himself from a reverie, which had degenerated into an absolute snooze.

‘Good night, my boy! Bolt the door behind me; and defy the Pope, the Devil, and the Pretender!’

Seaforth followed his friend’s advice, and the next morning came down to breakfast dressed in the habiliments of the preceding day. The charm was broken, the demon defeated; the light greys with the red stripe

down the seams were yet *in rerum naturâ*, and adorned the person of their lawful proprietor.

Tom felicitated himself and his partner of the watch on the result of their vigilance; but there is a rustic adage, which warns us against self-gratulation before we are quite 'out of the wood.'—Seaforth was yet within its verge.

A rap at Tom Ingoldsby's door the following morning startled him as he was shaving;—he cut his chin.

'Come in, and be d—d to you!' said the martyr, pressing his thumb on the scarified epidermis.—The door opened, and exhibited Mr. Barney Maguire.

'Well, Barney, what is it?' quoth the sufferer, adopting the vernacular of his visitant.

'The master, sir——'

'Well, what does he want?'

'The loanst of a breeches, plase your honour.'

'Why, you don't mean to tell me—— By Heaven, this is too good!' shouted Tom, bursting into a fit of uncontrollable laughter. 'Why, Barney, you don't mean to say the ghost has got them again?'

Mr. Maguire did not respond to the young squire's risibility; the cast of his countenance was decidedly serious.

'Faith, then, it's gone they are, sure enough! Hasn't meself been looking over the bed, and under the bed, and *in* the bed, for the matter of that, and divil a ha'p'orth of breeches is there to the fore at all:—I'm bothered entirely!'

'Hark'ee! Mr. Barney,' said Tom, incautiously removing his thumb, and letting a crimson stream 'incarnadine the multitudinous' lather that plastered his throat,— 'this may be all very well with your master, but you don't humbug *me*, sir:—tell me instantly what have you done with the clothes?'

This abrupt transition from 'lively to severe' certainly took Maguire by surprise, and he seemed for an instant as much disconcerted as it is possible to disconcert an Irish gentleman's gentleman.

'Me? is it meself, then, that's the ghost to your honour's thinking?' said he, after a moment's pause, and with a slight shade of indignation in his tones: 'is it I would stale the master's things,—and what would I do with them?'

'That you best know:—what your purpose is I can't guess, for I don't think you mean to "stale" them, as you call it; but that you are concerned in their disappearance, I am satisfied. Confound this blood!—give me a towel, Barney.'

Maguire acquitted himself of the commission. 'As I've a sowl, your honour,' said he, solemnly, 'little it is meself knows of the matter: and after what I seen—'

'What you've seen! Why, what *have* you seen?—Barney, I don't want to inquire into your flirtations; but don't suppose you can palm off your saucer eyes and gig-lamps upon me!'

'Then, as sure as your honour's standing there I saw him: and why wouldn't I, when Miss *Pauline* was to the fore as well as meself, and—'

'Get along with your nonsense,—leave the room, sir!'

'But the master?' said Barney, imploringly; 'and without a breeches?—sure he'll be catching cowl!—'

'Take that, rascal!' replied Ingoldsby, throwing a pair of pantaloons at, rather than to, him: 'but don't suppose, sir, you shall carry on your tricks here with impunity; recollect there is such a thing as a treadmill, and that my father is a county magistrate.'

Barney's eye flashed fire,—he stood erect, and was about to speak; but, mastering himself, not without an effort, he took up the garment, and left the room as perpendicular as a Quaker.

'Ingoldsby,' said Charles Seaforth, after breakfast, 'this is now past a joke; to-day is the last of my stay; for, notwithstanding the ties which detain me, common decency obliges me to visit home after so long an absence. I shall come to an immediate explanation with your father on the subject nearest my heart, and depart while I have a change of dress left. On his answer will my return

depend ! In the meantime tell me candidly,—I ask it in all seriousness, and as a friend,—am I not a dupe to your well-known propensity to hoaxing ? have you not a hand in——’

‘ No, by heaven, Seaforth ; I see what you mean : on my honour, I am as much mystified as yourself ; and if your servant——’

‘ Not he :—if there be a trick, he at least is not privy to it.’

‘ If there *be* a trick ? why, Charles, do you think——’

‘ I know not *what* to think, Tom. As surely as you are a living man, so surely did that spectral anatomy visit my room again last night, grin in my face, and walk away with my trousers ; nor was I able to spring from my bed, or break the chain which seemed to bind me to my pillow.’

‘ Seaforth ! ’ said Ingoldsby, after a short pause, ‘ I will—— But hush ! here are the girls and my father.—I will carry off the females, and leave you a clear field with the governor : carry your point with him, and we will talk about your breeches afterwards.’

Tom’s diversion was successful ; he carried off the ladies *en masse* to look at a remarkable specimen of the class *Dodecandria Monogynia*,—which they could not find ;—while Seaforth marched boldly up to the encounter, and carried ‘ the governor’s ’ outworks by a *coup de main*. I shall not stop to describe the progress of the attack ; suffice it that it was as successful as could have been wished, and that Seaforth was referred back again to the lady. The happy lover was off at a tangent ; the botanical party was soon overtaken ; and the arm of Caroline, whom a vain endeavour to spell out the Linnaean name of a daffy-down-dilly had detained a little in the rear of the others, was soon firmly locked in his own.

‘ What was the world to them,
Its noise, its nonsense, and its “ breeches ” all ? ’

Seaforth was in the seventh heaven ; he retired to his room that night as happy as if no such thing as a goblin

had ever been heard of, and personal chattels were as well fenced in by law as real property. Not so Tom Ingoldsby : the mystery,—for mystery there evidently was,—had not only piqued his curiosity, but ruffled his temper. The watch of the previous night had been unsuccessful, probably because it was undisguised. To-night he would 'ensconce himself,'—not indeed 'behind the arras,'—for the little that remained was, as we have seen, nailed to the wall,—but in a small closet which opened from one corner of the room, and, by leaving the door ajar, would give to its occupant a view of all that might pass in the apartment. Here did the young ghost-hunter take up a position, with a good stout sapling under his arm, a full half-hour before Seaforth retired for the night. Not even his friend did he let into his confidence, fully determined that if his plan did not succeed, the failure should be attributed to himself alone.

At the usual hour of separation for the night, Tom saw, from his concealment, the lieutenant enter his room, and, after taking a few turns in it, with an expression so joyous as to betoken that his thoughts were mainly occupied by his approaching happiness, proceed slowly to disrobe himself. The coat, the waistcoat, the black silk stock, were gradually discarded ; the green morocco slippers were kicked off, and then—ay, and then—his countenance grew grave ; it seemed to occur to him all at once that this was his last stake,—nay, that the very breeches he had on were not his own,—that to-morrow morning was his last, and that if he lost *them*—— A glance showed that his mind was made up ; he replaced the single button he had just subducted, and threw himself upon the bed in a state of transition,—half chrysalis, half grub.

Wearily did Tom Ingoldsby watch the sleeper by the flickering light of the night-lamp, till the clock striking one, induced him to increase the narrow opening which he had left for the purpose of observation. The motion, slight as it was, seemed to attract Charles's attention ; for he raised himself suddenly to a sitting posture, listened for a moment, and then stood upright upon the

floor. Ingoldsby was on the point of discovering himself, when, the light flashing full upon his friend's countenance, he perceived that, though his eyes were open, 'their sense was shut,' —that he was yet under the influence of sleep. Seaforth advanced slowly to the toilet, lit his candle at the lamp that stood on it, then, going back to the bed's foot, appeared to search eagerly for something which he could not find. For a few moments he seemed restless and uneasy, walking round the apartment and examining the chairs, till, coming fully in front of a large swing-glass that flanked the dressing-table, he paused, as if contemplating his figure in it. He now returned towards the bed ; put on his slippers, and, with cautious and stealthy steps, proceeded towards the little arched doorway that opened on the private staircase.

As he drew the bolt, Tom Ingoldsby emerged from his hiding-place ; but the sleep-walker heard him not ; he proceeded softly down stairs, followed at a due distance by his friend ; opened the door which led out upon the gardens ; and stood at once among the thickest of the shrubs, which there clustered round the base of a corner turret, and screened the postern from common observation. At this moment Ingoldsby had nearly spoiled all by making a false step : the sound attracted Seaforth's attention,—he paused and turned ; and, as the full moon shed her light directly upon his pale and troubled features, Tom marked, almost with dismay, the fixed and rayless appearance of his eyes :—

'There was no speculation in those orbs
That he did glare withal.'

The perfect stillness preserved by his follower seemed to reassure him ; he turned aside ; and from the midst of a thickset laurustinus, drew forth a gardener's spade, shouldering which he proceeded with greater rapidity into the midst of the shrubbery. Arrived at a certain point where the earth seemed to have been recently disturbed, he set himself heartily to the task of digging, till, having thrown up several shovelfuls of mould, he stopped, flung

down his tool, and very composedly began to disencumber himself of his pantaloons.

Up to this moment Tom had watched him with a wary eye: he now advanced cautiously, and, as his friend was busily engaged in disentangling himself from his garment, made himself master of the spade. Seaforth, meanwhile, had accomplished his purpose: he stood for a moment with

‘His streamers waving in the wind,’

occupied in carefully rolling up the small-clothes into as compact a form as possible, and all heedless of the breath of heaven, which might certainly be supposed at such a moment, and in such a plight, to ‘visit his frame too roughly.’

He was in the act of stooping low to deposit the pantaloons in the grave which he had been digging for them, when Tom Ingoldsby came close behind him, and with the flat side of the spade——

The shock was effectual;—never again was Lieutenant Seaforth known to act the part of a somnambulist. One by one, his breeches,—his trousers,—his pantaloons,—his silk-net tights,—his patent cords,—his showy greys with the broad red stripe of the Bombay Fencibles were brought to light,—rescued from the grave in which they had been buried, like the strata of a Christmas pie; and, after having been well aired by Mrs. Botherby, became once again effective.

The family, the ladies especially, laughed;—the Peterses laughed;—the Simpkinsons laughed;—Barney Maguire cried ‘*Botheration!*’ and Ma’m’selle Pauline, ‘*Mon Dieu!*’

Charles Seaforth, unable to face the quizzing which awaited him on all sides, started off two hours earlier than he had proposed:—he soon returned, however; and having, at his father-in-law’s request, given up the occupation of Rajah-hunting and shooting Nabobs, led his blushing bride to the altar.

Mr. Simpkinson from Bath did not attend the cere-

mony, being engaged at the Grand Junction Meeting of *Scavans*, then congregating from all parts of the known world in the city of Dublin. His essay, demonstrating that the globe is a great custard, whipped into coagulation by whirlwinds, and cooked by electricity,—a little too much baked in the Isle of Portland, and a thought underdone about the Bog of Allen,—was highly spoken of, and narrowly escaped obtaining a Bridgewater prize.

Miss Simpkinson and her sister acted as bridesmaids on the occasion ; the former wrote an *epithalamium*, and the latter cried 'Lassy me!' at the clergyman's wig. Some years have since rolled on ; the union has been crowned with two or three tidy little off-shoots from the family tree, of whom Master Neddy is 'grandpapa's darling,' and Mary Anne mamma's particular 'Sock.' I shall only add, that Mr. and Mrs. Seaforth are living together quite as happily as two good-hearted, good-tempered bodies, very fond of each other, can possibly do : and that since the day of his marriage Charles has shown no disposition to jump out of bed, or ramble out of doors o' nights,—though, from his entire devotion to every wish and whim of his young wife, Tom insinuates that the fair Caroline does still occasionally take advantage of it so far as to 'slip on the breeches.'

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

1804-1864

MR. HIGGINBOTHAM'S CATASTROPHE

A YOUNG fellow, a tobacco-pedlar by trade, was on his way from Morristown, where he had dealt largely with the Deacon of the Shaker settlement, to the village of Parker's Falls, on Salmon River. He had a neat little cart, painted green, with a box of cigars depicted on each side panel, and an Indian chief, holding a pipe and a golden tobacco-stalk, on the rear. The pedlar drove a smart little mare, and was a young man of excellent character, keen at a bargain, but none the worse liked by the Yankees ; who, as I have heard them say, would rather be shaved with a sharp razor than a dull one. Especially was he beloved by the pretty girls along the Connecticut, whose favour he used to court by presents of the best smoking tobacco in his stock ; knowing well that the country lasses of New England are generally great performers on pipes. Moreover, as will be seen in the course of my story, the pedlar was inquisitive, and something of a tattler, always itching to hear the news, and anxious to tell it again.

After an early breakfast at Morristown, the tobacco-pedlar, whose name was Dominicus Pike, had travelled seven miles through a solitary piece of woods, without speaking a word to anybody but himself and his little grey mare. It being nearly seven o'clock, he was as eager to hold a morning gossip as a city shopkeeper to read the morning paper. An opportunity seemed at hand, when, after lighting a cigar with a sun-glass, he looked up, and perceived a man coming over the brow of the hill, at the

foot of which the pedlar had stopped his green cart. Dominicus watched him as he descended, and noticed that he carried a bundle over his shoulder on the end of a stick, and travelled with a weary, yet determined pace. He did not look as if he had started in the freshness of the morning, but had footed it all night, and meant to do the same all day.

‘Good morning, mister,’ said Dominicus, when within speaking distance. ‘You go a pretty good jog. What’s the latest news at Parker’s Falls?’

The man pulled the broad brim of a grey hat over his eyes, and answered, rather sullenly, that he did not come from Parker’s Falls, which, as being the limit of his own day’s journey, the pedlar had naturally mentioned in his inquiry.

‘Well, then,’ rejoined Dominicus Pike, ‘let’s have the latest news where you did come from. I’m not particular about Parker’s Falls. Any place will answer.’

Being thus importuned, the traveller—who was as ill-looking a fellow as one would desire to meet, in a solitary piece of woods—appeared to hesitate a little, as if he was either searching his memory for news, or weighing the expediency of telling it. At last mounting on the step of the cart, he whispered in the ear of Dominicus, though he might have shouted aloud and no other mortal would have heard him.

‘I do remember one little trifle of news,’ said he. ‘Old Mr. Higginbotham, of Kimballton, was murdered in his orchard at eight o’clock last night, by an Irishman and a nigger. They strung him up to the branch of a St. Michael’s pear-tree, where nobody would find him till the morning.’

As soon as this horrible intelligence was communicated, the stranger betook himself to his journey again, with more speed than ever, not even turning his head when Dominicus invited him to smoke a Spanish cigar and relate all the particulars. The pedlar whistled to his mare and went up the hill, pondering on the doleful fate of Mr. Higginbotham, whom he had known in the way of trade, having sold him many a bunch of long nines, and

a great deal of pigtail, lady's twist, and fig tobacco. He was rather astonished at the rapidity with which the news had spread. Kimballton was nearly sixty miles distant in a straight line; the murder had been perpetrated only at eight o'clock the preceding night; yet Dominicus had heard of it at seven in the morning, when, in all probability, poor Mr. Higginbotham's own family had but just discovered his corpse, hanging on the St. Michael's pear-tree. The stranger on foot must have worn seven-league boots, to travel at such a rate.

'Ill news flies fast, they say,' thought Dominicus Pike; 'but this beats railroads. The fellow ought to be hired to go express with the President's Message.'

The difficulty was solved, by supposing that the narrator had made a mistake of one day, in the date of the occurrence; so that our friend did not hesitate to introduce the story at every tavern and country store along the road, expending a whole bunch of Spanish wrappers among at least twenty horrified audiences. He found himself invariably the first bearer of the intelligence, and was so pestered with questions that he could not avoid filling up the outline, till it became quite a respectable narrative. He met with one piece of corroborative evidence. Mr. Higginbotham was a trader; and a former clerk of his, to whom Dominicus related the facts, testified that the old gentleman was accustomed to return home through the orchard, about nightfall, with the money and valuable papers of the store in his pocket. The clerk manifested but little grief at Mr. Higginbotham's catastrophe, hinting, what the pedlar had discovered in his own dealings with him, that he was a crusty old fellow, as close as a vice. His property would descend to a pretty niece who was now keeping school in Kimballton.

What with telling the news for the public good, and driving bargains for his own, Dominicus was so much delayed on the road, that he chose to put up at a tavern, about five miles short of Parker's Falls. After supper, lighting one of his prime cigars, he seated himself in the bar-room, and went through the story of the murder

which had grown so fast that it took him half an hour to tell. There were as many as twenty people in the room, nineteen of whom received it all for gospel. But the twentieth was an elderly farmer, who had arrived on horse-back a short time before, and was now seated in a corner, smoking his pipe. When the story was concluded, he rose up very deliberately, brought his chair right in front of Dominicus, and stared him full in the face, puffing out the vilest tobacco-smoke the pedlar had ever smelt.

'Will you make an affidavit,' demanded he in the tone of a country justice taking an examination, 'that old Squire Higginbotham of Kimballton was murdered in his orchard the night before last, and found hanging on his great pear-tree yesterday morning?'

'I tell the story as I heard it, mister,' answered Dominicus, dropping his half-burnt cigar; 'I don't say that I saw the thing done. So I can't take my oath that he was murdered exactly in that way.'

'But I can take mine,' said the farmer, 'that if Squire Higginbotham was murdered night before last, I drank a glass of bitters with his ghost this morning. Being a neighbour of mine, he called me into his store, as I was riding by, and treated me, and then asked me to do a little business for him on the road. He didn't seem to know any more about his own murder than I did.'

'Why, then it can't be a fact!' exclaimed Dominicus Pike.

'I guess he'd have mentioned it, if it was,' said the old farmer; and he removed his chair back to the corner, leaving Dominicus quite down in the mouth.

Here was a sad resurrection of old Mr. Higginbotham! The pedlar had no heart to mingle in the conversation any more, but comforted himself with a glass of gin-and-water, and went to bed, where, all night long, he dreamed of hanging on the St. Michael's pear-tree. To avoid the old farmer (whom he so detested that his suspension would have pleased him better than Mr. Higginbotham's), Dominicus rose in the grey of the morning, put the little mare into the green cart, and trotted swiftly away towards Parker's Falls. The fresh breeze, the dewy road,

and the pleasant summer dawn revived his spirits, and might have encouraged him to repeat the old story, had there been anybody awake to hear it. But he met neither ox team, light wagon, chaise, horseman, nor foot traveller, till, just as he crossed Salmon River, a man came trudging down to the bridge with a bundle over his shoulder, on the end of a stick.

'Good morning, mister,' said the pedlar, reining in his mare. 'If you come from Kimballton or that neighbourhood, may be you can tell me the real fact about this affair of old Mr. Higginbotham. Was the old fellow actually murdered two or three nights ago, by an Irishman and a nigger?'

Dominicus had spoken in too great a hurry to observe, at first, that the stranger himself had a deep tinge of negro blood. On hearing this sudden question, the Ethiopian appeared to change his skin, its yellow hue becoming a ghastly white, while, shaking and stammering, he thus replied:—

'No! no! There was no coloured man! It was an Irishman that hanged him last night, at eight o'clock. I came away at seven! His folks can't have looked for him in the orchard yet.'

Scarcely had the yellow man spoken, when he interrupted himself, and though he seemed weary enough before, continued his journey at a pace which would have kept the pedlar's mare on a smart trot. Dominicus stared after him in great perplexity. If the murder had not been committed till Tuesday night, who was the prophet that had foretold it, in all its circumstances, on Tuesday morning? If Mr. Higginbotham's corpse were not yet discovered by his own family, how came the mulatto, at above thirty miles distance, to know that he was hanging in the orchard, especially as he had left Kimballton before the unfortunate man was hanged at all? These ambiguous circumstances, with the stranger's surprise and terror, made Dominicus think of raising a hue and cry after him, as an accomplice in the murder; since a murder, it seemed, had really been perpetrated

'But let the poor devil go,' thought the pedlar. 'I don't want his black blood on my head; and hanging the nigger wouldn't unhang Mr. Higginbotham. Unhang the old gentleman! It's a sin, I know; but I should hate to have him come to life a second time, and give me the lie!'

With these meditations, Dominicus Pike drove into the street of Parker's Falls, which, as everybody knows, is as thriving a village as three cotton-factories and a slitting-mill can make it. The machinery was not in motion, and but a few of the shop-doors unbarred, when he alighted in the stable-yard of the tavern, and made it his first business to order the mare four quarts of oats. His second duty, of course, was to impart Mr. Higginbotham's catastrophe to the ostler. He deemed it advisable, however, not to be too positive as to the date of the direful fact, and also to be uncertain whether it were perpetrated by an Irishman and a mulatto, or by the son of Erin alone. Neither did he profess to relate it on his own authority, or that of any other person; but mentioned it as a report generally diffused.

The story ran through the town like fire among girdled trees, and became so much the universal talk, that nobody could tell whence it had originated. Mr. Higginbotham was as well known at Parker's Falls as any citizen of the place, being part owner of the slitting-mill, and a considerable stockholder in the cotton-factories. The inhabitants felt their own prosperity interested in his fate. Such was the excitement, that the *Parker's Falls Gazette* anticipated its regular day of publication, and came out with half a form of blank paper and a column of double pica emphasized with capitals, and headed HORRID MURDER OF MR. HIGGINBOTHAM! Among other dreadful details, the printed account described the mark of the cord round the dead man's neck, and stated the number of thousand dollars of which he had been robbed; there was much pathos also about the affliction of his niece, who had gone from one fainting fit to another, ever since her uncle was found hanging on the St. Michael's pear-tree with his pockets

inside out. The village poet likewise commemorated the young lady's grief in seventeen stanzas of a ballad. The selectmen held a meeting, and, in consideration of Mr. Higginbotham's claims on the town, determined to issue handbills, offering a reward of five hundred dollars for the apprehension of his murderers, and the recovery of the stolen property.

Meanwhile the whole population of Parker's Falls, consisting of shopkeepers, mistresses of boarding-houses, factory-girls, mill-men, and school-boys, rushed into the street and kept up such a terrible loquacity, as more than compensated for the silence of the cotton-machines, which refrained from their usual din, out of respect to the deceased. Had Mr. Higginbotham cared about posthumous renown, his untimely ghost would have exulted in this tumult. Our friend Dominicus, in his vanity of heart, forgot his intended precautions, and mounting on the town-pump, announced himself as the bearer of the authentic intelligence which had caused so wonderful a sensation. He immediately became the great man of the moment, and had just begun a new edition of the narrative, with a voice like a field preacher, when the mail-stage drove into the village street. It had travelled all night, and must have shifted horses at Kimballton at three in the morning.

'Now we shall hear all the particulars,' shouted the crowd.

The coach rumbled up to the piazza of the tavern, followed by a thousand people; for if any man had been minding his own business till then, he now left it at sixes and sevens, to hear the news. The pedlar, foremost in the race, discovered two passengers, both of whom had been startled from a comfortable nap to find themselves in the centre of a mob. Every man assailing them with separate questions, all propounded at once, the couple were struck speechless, though one was a lawyer and the other a young lady.

'Mr. Higginbotham! Mr. Higginbotham! Tell us the particulars about old Mr. Higginbotham!' bawled the mob. 'What is the coroner's verdict? Are the

murderers apprehended? Is Mr. Higginbotham's niece come out of her fainting fits? Mr. Higginbotham! Mr. Higginbotham!

The coachman said not a word, except to swear awfully at the ostler for not bringing him a fresh team of horses. The lawyer inside had generally his wits about him, even when asleep; the first thing he did, after learning the cause of the excitement, was to produce a large red pocket-book. Meantime, Dominicus Pike, being an extremely polite young man, and also suspecting that a female tongue would tell the story as glibly as a lawyer's, had handed the lady out of the coach. She was a fine, smart girl, now wide awake and bright as a button, and had such a sweet pretty mouth, that Dominicus would almost as lief have heard a love tale from it as a tale of murder.

'Gentlemen and ladies,' said the lawyer, to the shopkeepers, the mill-men, and the factory-girls, 'I can assure you that some unaccountable mistake, or, more probably, a wilful falsehood, maliciously contrived to injure Mr. Higginbotham's credit, has excited this singular uproar. We passed through Kimballton at three o'clock this morning, and most certainly should have been informed of the murder had any been perpetrated. But I have proof nearly as strong as Mr. Higginbotham's own oral testimony in the negative. Here is a note, relating to a suit of his in the Connecticut courts, which was delivered me from that gentleman himself. I find it dated at ten o'clock last evening.'

So saying, the lawyer exhibited the date and signature of the note, which irrefragably proved, either that this perverse Mr. Higginbotham was alive when he wrote it, or—as some deemed the more probable case of two doubtful ones—that he was so absorbed in worldly business as to continue to transact it, even after his death. But unexpected evidence was forthcoming. The young lady, after listening to the pedlar's explanation, merely seized a moment to smooth her gown and put her curls in order, and then appeared at the tavern door, making a modest signal to be heard.

'Good people,' said she, 'I am Mr. Higginbotham's niece.'

A wondering murmur passed through the crowd, on beholding her so rosy and bright; the same unhappy niece, whom they had supposed, on the authority of the *Parker's Falls Gazette*, to be lying at death's door in a fainting fit. But some shrewd fellows had doubted, all along, whether a young lady would be quite so desperate at the hanging of a rich old uncle.

'You see,' continued Miss Higginbotham, with a smile, 'that this strange story is quite unfounded, as to myself; and I believe I may affirm it to be equally so, in regard to my dear uncle Higginbotham. He has the kindness to give me a home in his house, though I contribute to my own support by teaching a school. I left Kimballton this morning to spend the vacation of commencement week with a friend, about five miles from Parker's Falls. My generous uncle, when he heard me on the stairs, called me to his bedside, and gave me two dollars and fifty cents, to pay my stage fare, and another dollar for my extra expenses. He then laid his pocket-book under his pillow, shook hands with me, and advised me to take some biscuit in my bag, instead of breakfasting on the road. I feel confident, therefore, that I left my beloved relative alive, and trust that I shall find him so on my return.'

The young lady courtesied at the close of her speech, which was so sensible and well worded, and delivered with such grace and propriety, that everybody thought her fit to be preceptress of the best academy in the State. But a stranger would have supposed that Mr. Higginbotham was an object of abhorrence at Parker's Falls, and that a thanksgiving had been proclaimed for his murder, so excessive was the wrath of the inhabitants, on learning their mistake. The mill-men resolved to bestow public honours on Dominicus Pike, only hesitating whether to tar and feather him, ride him on a rail, or refresh him with an ablution at the town pump, on the top of which he had declared himself the bearer of the news. The selectmen, by advice of the lawyer,

spoke of prosecuting him for a misdemeanour, in circulating unfounded reports, to the great disturbance of the peace of the Commonwealth. Nothing saved Dominicus, either from mob law or a court of justice, but an eloquent appeal made by the young lady in his behalf. Addressing a few words of heartfelt gratitude to his benefactress, he mounted the green cart and rode out of town, under a discharge of artillery from the school-boys, who found plenty of ammunition in the neighbouring claypits and mudholes. As he turned his head, to exchange a farewell glance with Mr. Higginbotham's niece, a ball of the consistence of hasty-pudding hit him slap in the mouth, giving him a most grim aspect. His whole person was so bespattered with the like filthy missiles, that he had almost a mind to ride back, and supplicate for the threatened ablution at the town pump ; for, though not meant in kindness, it would now have been a deed of charity.

However, the sun shone bright on poor Dominicus, and the mud, an emblem of all stains of undeserved opprobrium, was easily brushed off when dry. Being a funny rogue, his heart soon cheered up ; nor could he refrain from a hearty laugh at the uproar which his story had excited. The handbills of the selectmen would cause the commitment of all the vagabonds in the State ; the paragraph in the *Parker's Falls Gazette* would be reprinted from Maine to Florida, and perhaps form an item in the London newspapers ; and many a miser would tremble for his money-bags and life, on learning the catastrophe of Mr. Higginbotham. The pedlar meditated with much fervour on the charms of the young schoolmistress, and swore that Daniel Webster never spoke nor looked so like an angel as Miss Higginbotham, while defending him from the wrathful populace at Parker's Falls.

Dominicus was now on the Kimballton turnpike, having all along determined to visit that place, though business had drawn him out of the most direct road from Morristown. As he approached the scene of the supposed murder, he continued to revolve the circumstances

in his mind, and was astonished at the aspect which the whole case assumed. Had nothing occurred to corroborate the story of the first traveller, it might now have been considered as a hoax; but the yellow man was evidently acquainted either with the report or the fact; and there was a mystery in his dismayed and guilty look on being abruptly questioned. When, to this singular combination of incidents, it was added that the rumour tallied exactly with Mr. Higginbotham's character and habits of life; and that he had an orchard, and a St. Michael's pear-tree, near which he always passed at nightfall; the circumstantial evidence appeared so strong that Dominicus doubted whether the autograph produced by the lawyer, or even the niece's direct testimony, ought to be equivalent. Making cautious inquiries along the road, the pedlar further learned that Mr. Higginbotham had in his service an Irishman of doubtful character, whom he had hired without a recommendation, on the score of economy.

'May I be hanged myself,' exclaimed Dominicus Pike aloud, on reaching the top of a lonely hill, 'if I'll believe old Higginbotham is unchanged, till I see him with my own eyes, and hear it from his own mouth! And as he's a real shaver, I'll have the minister or some other responsible man, for an indorser.'

It was growing dusk when he reached the toll-house on Kimballton turnpike, about a quarter of a mile from the village of this name. His little mare was fast bringing him up with a man on horseback, who trotted through the gate a few rods in advance of him, nodded to the toll-gatherers, and kept on towards the village. Dominicus was acquainted with the tollman, and while making change, the usual remarks on the weather passed between them.

'I suppose,' said the pedlar, throwing back his whip-lash to bring it down like a feather on the mare's flank, 'you have not seen anything of old Mr. Higginbotham within a day or two?'

'Yes,' answered the toll-gatherer. 'He passed the gate just before you drove up, and yonder he rides now,

if you can see him through the dusk. He's been to Woodfield this afternoon, attending a sheriff's sale there. The old man generally shakes hands and has a little chat with me ; but to-night he nodded,—as if to say, 'Charge my toll,'—and jogged on ; for wherever he goes, he must always be at home by eight o'clock.'

'So they tell me,' said Dominicus.

'I never saw a man look so yellow and thin as the squire does,' continued the toll-gatherer. 'Says I to myself to-night, he's more like a ghost or an old mummy than good flesh and blood.'

The pedlar strained his eyes through the twilight, and could just discern the horseman now far ahead on the village road. He seemed to recognize the rear of Mr. Higginbotham ; but through the evening shadows, and amid the dust from the horse's feet, the figure appeared dim and unsubstantial ; as if the shape of the mysterious old man were faintly moulded of darkness and grey light. Dominicus shivered.

'Mr. Higginbotham has come back from the other world, by way of the Kimballton turnpike,' thought he.

He shook the reins and rode forward, keeping about the same distance in the rear of the grey old shadow, till the latter was concealed by a bend of the road. On reaching this point, the pedlar no longer saw the man on horseback, but found himself at the head of the village street, not far from a number of stores and two taverns, clustered round the meeting-house steeple. On his left were a stone wall and a gate, the boundary of a wood-lot, beyond which lay an orchard, farther still a mowing field, and last of all a house. These were the premises of Mr. Higginbotham, whose dwelling stood beside the old highway, but had been left in the background by the Kimballton turnpike. Dominicus knew the place ; and the little mare stopped short by instinct ; for he was not conscious of tightening the reins.

'For the soul of me, I cannot get by this gate !' said he, trembling. 'I never shall be my own man again, till I see whether Mr. Higginbotham is hanging on the St. Michael's pear-tree !'

He leaped from the cart, gave the rein a turn round the gate-post, and ran along the green path of the wood-lot, as if Old Nick were chasing behind. Just then the village clock tolled eight, and as each deep stroke fell, Dominicus gave a fresh bound and flew faster than before, till, dim in the solitary centre of the orchard, he saw the fated pear-tree. One great branch stretched from the old contorted trunk across the path, and threw the darkest shadow on that one spot. But something seemed to struggle beneath the branch!

The pedlar had never pretended to more courage than befits a man of peaceable occupation, nor could he account for his valour on this awful emergency. Certain it is, however, that he rushed forward, prostrated a sturdy Irishman with the butt-end of his whip, and found—not indeed hanging on the St. Michael's pear-tree, but trembling beneath it, with a halter round his neck—the old, identical Mr. Higginbotham!

‘Mr. Higginbotham,’ said Dominicus, tremulously, ‘you’re an honest man, and I’ll take your word for it. Have you been hanged, or not?’

If the riddle be not already guessed, a few words will explain the simple machinery by which this ‘coming event’ was made to ‘cast its shadow before.’ Three men had plotted the robbery and murder of Mr. Higginbotham; two of them, successively, lost courage and fled, each delaying the crime one night, by their disappearance; the third was in the act of perpetration, when a champion, blindly obeying the call of fate, like the heroes of old romance, appeared in the person of Dominicus Pike.

It only remains to say, that Mr. Higginbotham took the pedlar into high favour, sanctioned his addresses to the pretty schoolmistress, and settled his whole property on their children, allowing themselves the interest. In due time, the old gentleman capped the climax of his favours by dying a Christian death, in bed, since which melancholy event Dominicus Pike has removed from Kimballton, and established a large tobacco manufactory in my native village.

EDGAR ALLAN POE

1809-1849

THE PURLOINED LETTER

'Nil sapientiæ odiosius acumine nimio.'—SENECA.

AT Paris, just after dark one gusty evening in the autumn of 18—, I was enjoying the twofold luxury of meditation and a meerschaum, in company with my friend, C. Auguste Dupin, in his little back library or book-closet, *au troisième*, No. 33 Rue Dunôt, Faubourg St. Germain. For one hour at least we had maintained a profound silence; while each, to any casual observer, might have seemed intently and exclusively occupied with the curling eddies of smoke that oppressed the atmosphere of the chamber. For myself, however, I was mentally discussing certain topics which had formed matter for conversation between us at an earlier period of the evening; I mean the affair of the Rue Morgue, and the mystery attending the murder of Marie Rogêt. I looked upon it, therefore, as something of a coincidence, when the door of our apartment was thrown open and admitted our old acquaintance, Monsieur G—, the Prefect of the Parisian police.

We gave him a hearty welcome; for there was nearly half as much of the entertaining as of the contemptible about the man, and we had not seen him for several years. We had been sitting in the dark, and Dupin now arose for the purpose of lighting a lamp, but sat down again, without doing so, upon G.'s saying that he had called to consult us, or rather to ask the opinion of my friend, about some official business which had occasioned a great deal of trouble.

'If it is any point requiring reflection,' observed Dupin, as he forbore to enkindle the wick, 'we shall examine it to better purpose in the dark.'

'That is another of your odd notions,' said the Prefect, who had a fashion of calling everything 'odd' that was beyond his comprehension, and thus lived amid an absolute legion of 'oddities.'

'Very true,' said Dupin, as he supplied his visitor with a pipe, and rolled towards him a comfortable chair.

'And what is the difficulty now?' I asked. 'Nothing more in the assassination way, I hope?'

'Oh, no; nothing of that nature. The fact is, the business is *very* simple indeed, and I make no doubt that we can manage it sufficiently well ourselves; but then I thought Dupin would like to hear the details of it, because it is so excessively *odd*.'

'Simple and odd,' said Dupin.

'Why, yes; and not exactly that, either. The fact is, we have all been a good deal puzzled because the affair is so simple, and yet baffles us altogether.'

'Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault,' said my friend.

'What nonsense you *do* talk!' replied the Prefect, laughing heartily.

'Perhaps the mystery is a little *too* plain,' said Dupin.

'Oh, good heavens! who ever heard of such an idea?'

'A little *too* self-evident.'

'Ha! ha! ha!—ha! ha! ha!—ho! ho! ho!' roared our visitor, profoundly amused; 'O Dupin, you will be the death of me yet!'

'And what, after all, is the matter on hand?' I asked.

'Why, I will tell you,' replied the Prefect, as he gave a long, steady, and contemplative puff, and settled himself in his chair. 'I will tell you in a few words; but, before I begin, let me caution you that this is an affair demanding the greatest secrecy, and that I should most probably lose the position I now hold, were it known that I confided it to any one.'

'Proceed,' said I.

'Or not,' said Dupin.

'Well, then; I have received personal information, from a very high quarter, that a certain document of the last importance has been purloined from the royal apartments. The individual who purloined it is known; this beyond a doubt; he was seen to take it. It is known, also, that it still remains in his possession.'

'How is this known?' asked Dupin.

'It is clearly inferred,' replied the Prefect, 'from the nature of the document, and from the non-appearance of certain results which would at once arise from its passing out of the robber's possession—that is to say, from his employing it as he must design in the end to employ it.'

'Be a little more explicit,' I said.

'Well, I may venture so far as to say that the paper gives its holder a certain power in a certain quarter where such power is immensely valuable.' The Prefect was fond of the cant of diplomacy.

'Still I do not quite understand,' said Dupin.

'No? Well: the disclosure of the document to a third person, who shall be nameless, would bring in question the honour of a personage of most exalted station; and this fact gives the holder of the document an ascendancy over the illustrious personage whose honour and peace are so jeopardised.'

'But this ascendancy,' I interposed, 'would depend upon the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber. Who would dare——'

'The thief,' said G., 'is the Minister D——, who dares all things, those unbecoming as well as those becoming a man. The method of the theft was not less ingenious than bold. The document in question—a letter, to be frank—had been received by the personage robbed while alone in the royal *boudoir*. During its perusal she was suddenly interrupted by the entrance of the other exalted personage from whom especially it was her wish to conceal it. After a hurried and vain endeavour to thrust it in a drawer, she was forced to place it, open as it was, upon a table. The address, however, was uppermost, and, the contents thus unexposed, the letter

escaped notice. At this juncture enters the Minister D—. His lynx eye immediately perceives the paper, recognises the handwriting of the address, observes the confusion of the personage addressed, and fathoms her secret. After some business transactions, hurried through in his ordinary manner, he produces a letter somewhat similar to the one in question, opens it, pretends to read it, and then places it in close juxtaposition to the other. Again he converses, for some fifteen minutes, upon the public affairs. At length, in taking leave, he takes also from the table the letter to which he had no claim. Its rightful owner saw, but, of course, dared not call attention to the act, in the presence of the third personage who stood at her elbow. The Minister decamped, leaving his own letter—one of no importance—upon the table.

‘Here, then,’ said Dupin to me, ‘you have precisely what you demand to make the ascendancy complete—the robber’s knowledge of the loser’s knowledge of the robber.’

‘Yes,’ replied the Prefect; ‘and the power thus attained has, for some months past, been wielded, for political purposes, to a very dangerous extent. The personage robbed is more thoroughly convinced, every day, of the necessity of reclaiming her letter. But this, of course, cannot be done openly. In fine, driven to despair, she has committed the matter to me.’

‘Than whom,’ said Dupin, amid a perfect whirlwind of smoke, ‘no more sagacious agent could, I suppose, be desired, or even imagined.’

‘You flatter me,’ replied the Prefect; ‘but it is possible that some such opinion may have been entertained.’

‘It is clear,’ said I, ‘as you observe, that the letter is still in the possession of the Minister; since it is this possession, and not any employment of the letter, which bestows the power. With the employment the power departs.’

‘True,’ said G.; ‘and upon this conviction I proceeded. My first care was to make thorough search of the Minister’s hotel; and here my chief embarrassment

lay in the necessity of searching without his knowledge. Beyond all things, I have been warned of the danger which would result from giving him reason to suspect our design.'

'But,' said I, 'you are quite *au fait* in these investigations. The Parisian police have done this thing often before.'

'Oh yes; and for this reason I did not despair. The habits of the Minister gave me, too, a great advantage. He is frequently absent from home all night. His servants are by no means numerous. They sleep at a distance from their master's apartment, and, being chiefly Neapolitans, are readily made drunk. I have keys, as you know, with which I can open any chamber or cabinet in Paris. For three months a night has not passed, during the greater part of which I have not been engaged, personally, in ransacking the D—— Hotel. My honour is interested, and, to mention a great secret, the reward is enormous. So I did not abandon the search until I had become fully satisfied that the thief is a more astute man than myself. I fancy that I have investigated every nook and corner of the premises in which it is possible that the paper can be concealed.'

'But is it not possible,' I suggested, 'that although the letter may be in possession of the Minister, as it unquestionably is, he may have concealed it elsewhere than upon his own premises?'

'This is barely possible,' said Dupin. 'The present peculiar condition of affairs at court, and especially of those intrigues in which D—— is known to be involved, would render the instant availability of the document—its susceptibility of being produced at a moment's notice—a point of nearly equal importance with its possession.'

'Its susceptibility of being produced?' said I.

'That is to say, of being *destroyed*,' said Dupin.

'True,' I observed; 'the paper is clearly then upon the premises. As for its being upon the person of the Minister, we may consider that as out of the question.'

'Entirely,' said the Prefect. 'He has been twice waylaid, as if by footpads, and his person rigorously searched under my own inspection.'

'You might have spared yourself this trouble,' said Dupin. 'D——, I presume, is not altogether a fool, and, if not, must have anticipated these waylayings, as a matter of course.'

'Not *altogether* a fool,' said G.; 'but then he's a poet, which I take to be only one remove from a fool.'

'True,' said Dupin, after a long and thoughtful whiff from his *meerschaum*, 'although I have been guilty of certain *doggerel* myself.'

'Suppose you detail,' said I, 'the particulars of your search.'

'Why, the fact is we took our time, and we searched *everywhere*. I have had long experience in these affairs. I took the entire building, room by room; devoting the nights of a whole week to each. We examined, first, the furniture of each apartment. We opened every possible drawer; and I presume you know that, to a properly trained police agent, such a thing as a *secret* drawer is impossible. Any man is a *dolt* who permits a "secret" drawer to escape him in a search of this kind. The thing is *so* plain. There is a certain amount of bulk—of space—to be accounted for in every cabinet. Then we have accurate rules. The fiftieth part of a line could not escape us. After the cabinets we took the chairs. The cushions we probed with the fine long needles you have seen me employ. From the tables we removed the tops.'

'Why so?'

'Sometimes the top of a table, or other similarly arranged piece of furniture, is removed by the person wishing to conceal an article; then the leg is excavated, the article deposited within the cavity, and the top replaced. The bottoms and tops of bedposts are employed in the same way.'

'But could not the cavity be detected by sounding?' I asked.

'By no means, if, when the article is deposited, a sufficient wadding of cotton be placed around it.'

Besides, in our case, we were obliged to proceed without noise.'

'But you could not have removed—you could not have taken to pieces *all* articles of furniture in which it would have been possible to make a deposit in the manner you mention. A letter may be compressed into a thin spiral roll, not differing much in shape or bulk from a large knitting-needle, and in this form it might be inserted into the rung of a chair, for example. You did not take to pieces all the chairs?'

'Certainly not; but we did better—we examined the rungs of every chair in the hotel, and, indeed, the jointings of every description of furniture, by the aid of a most powerful microscope. Had there been any traces of recent disturbance we should not have failed to detect it instantly. A single grain of gimlet-dust, for example, would have been as obvious as an apple. Any disorder in the glueing—any unusual gaping in the joints—would have sufficed to ensure detection.'

'I presume you looked to the mirrors, between the boards and the plates, and you probed the beds and the bedclothes, as well as the curtains and carpets.'

'That of course; and when we had absolutely completed every particle of the furniture in this way, then we examined the house itself. We divided its entire surface into compartments, which we numbered, so that none might be missed; then we scrutinised each individual square inch throughout the premises, including the two houses immediately adjoining, with the microscope, as before.'

'The two houses adjoining!' I exclaimed; 'you must have had a great deal of trouble.'

'We had; but the reward offered is prodigious.'

'You include the *grounds* about the houses?'

'All the grounds are paved with brick. They gave us comparatively little trouble. We examined the moss between the bricks and found it undisturbed.'

'You looked among D——'s papers, of course, and into the books of the library?'

'Certainly; we opened every package and parcel;

we not only opened every book, but we turned over every leaf in each volume, not contenting ourselves with a mere shake, according to the fashion of some of our police officers. We also measured the thickness of every book-cover, with the most accurate admeasurement, and applied to each the most jealous scrutiny of the microscope. Had any of the bindings been recently meddled with, it would have been utterly impossible that the fact should have escaped observation. Some five or six volumes, just from the hands of the binder, we carefully probed longitudinally, with the needles.'

'You explored the floors beneath the carpets?'

'Beyond doubt. We removed every carpet, and examined the boards with the microscope.'

'And the paper on the walls?'

'Yes.'

'You looked into the cellars?'

'We did.'

'Then,' I said, 'you have been making a miscalculation, and the letter is *not* upon the premises, as you suppose.'

'I fear you are right there,' said the Prefect. 'And now, Dupin, what would you advise me to do?'

'To make a thorough research of the premises.'

'That is absolutely needless,' replied G——. 'I am not more sure that I breathe than I am that the letter is not at the hotel.'

'I have no better advice to give you,' said Dupin. 'You have, of course, an accurate description of the letter?'

'Oh yes!' And here the Prefect, producing a memorandum-book, proceeded to read aloud a minute account of the internal, and especially of the external appearance of the missing document. Soon after finishing the perusal of this description, he took his departure more entirely depressed in spirits than I had ever known the good gentleman before.

In about a month afterwards he paid us another visit, and found us occupied very nearly as before. He took a pipe and a chair and entered into some ordinary conversation. At length I said—

'Well, but G——, what of the purloined letter? I presume you have at last made up your mind that there is no such thing as overreaching the Minister?'

'Confound him, say I—yes; I made the re-examination, however, as Dupin suggested—but it was all labour lost, as I knew it would be.'

'How much was the reward offered, did you say?' asked Dupin.

'Why, a very great deal—a *very* liberal reward—I don't like to say how much, precisely; but I *will* say, that I wouldn't mind giving my individual cheque for fifty thousand francs to any one who could obtain me that letter. The fact is, it is becoming of more and more importance every day; and the reward has been lately doubled. If it were trebled, however, I could do no more than I have done.'

'Why, yes,' said Dupin drawlingly, between the whiffs of his meerschaum, 'I really—think, G——, you have not exerted yourself—to the utmost—in this matter. You might—do a little more, I think, eh?'

'How?—in what way?'

'Why—puff, puff—you might—puff, puff—employ counsel in the matter, eh?—puff, puff, puff. Do you remember the story they tell of Abernethy?'

'No; hang Abernethy!'

'To be sure! hang him and welcome. But once upon a time, a certain rich miser conceived the design of sponging upon this Abernethy for a medical opinion. Getting up, for this purpose, an ordinary conversation in a private company, he insinuated his case to the physician, as that of an imaginary individual.

"We will suppose," said the miser, "that his symptoms are such and such; now, doctor, what would you have directed him to take?'

"Take!" said Abernethy, "why, take *advice*, to be sure."

'But,' said the Prefect, a little discomposed, 'I am *perfectly* willing to take *advice*, and to pay for it. I would *really* give fifty thousand francs to any one who would aid me in the matter.'

'In that case,' replied Dupin, opening a drawer, and producing a cheque-book, 'you may as well fill me up a cheque for the amount mentioned. When you have signed it, I will hand you the letter.'

I was astounded. The Prefect appeared absolutely thunderstricken. For some minutes he remained speechless and motionless, looking incredulously at my friend with open mouth, and eyes that seemed starting from their sockets; then, apparently recovering himself in some measure, he seized a pen, and after several pauses and vacant stares, finally filled up and signed a cheque for fifty thousand francs, and handed it across the table to Dupin. The latter examined it carefully and deposited it in his pocket-book; then, unlocking an *escritoire*, took thence a letter and gave it to the Prefect. This functionary grasped it in a perfect agony of joy, opened it with a trembling hand, cast a rapid glance at its contents, and then, scrambling and struggling to the door, rushed at length unceremoniously from the room and from the house, without having uttered a syllable since Dupin had requested him to fill up the cheque.

When he had gone, my friend entered into some explanations.

'The Parisian police,' he said, 'are exceedingly able in their way. They are persevering, ingenious, cunning, and thoroughly versed in the knowledge which their duties seem chiefly to demand. Thus, when G—— detailed to us his mode of searching the premises at the Hotel D——, I felt entire confidence in his having made a satisfactory investigation—so far as his labours extended.'

'So far as his labours extended?' said I.

'Yes,' said Dupin. 'The measures adopted were not only the best of their kind, but carried out to absolute perfection. Had the letter been deposited within the range of their search, these fellows would, beyond a question, have found it.'

I merely laughed—but he seemed quite serious in all that he said.

'The measures, then,' he continued, 'were good in

their kind, and well executed ; their defect lay in their being inapplicable to the case, and to the man. A certain set of highly ingenious resources are, with the Prefect, a sort of Procrustean bed, to which he forcibly adapts his designs. But he perpetually errs by being too deep or too shallow for the matter in hand ; and many a schoolboy is a better reasoner than he. I knew one about eight years of age, whose success at guessing in the game of "even and odd" attracted universal admiration. This game is simple, and is played with marbles. One player holds in his hand a number of these toys, and demands of another whether that number is even or odd. If the guess is right, the guesser wins one ; if wrong he loses one. The boy to whom I allude won all the marbles of the school. Of course he had some principle of guessing ; and this lay in mere observation and admeasurement of the astuteness of his opponents. For example, an arrant simpleton is his opponent, and, holding up his closed hand, asks, "Are they even or odd?" Our schoolboy replies "Odd," and loses ; but upon the second trial he wins, for he then says to himself, "The simpleton had them even upon the first trial, and his amount of cunning is just sufficient to make him have them odd upon the second ; I will therefore guess odd"—he guesses odd, and wins. Now, with a simpleton a degree above the first, he would have reasoned thus : "This fellow finds that in the first instance I guessed odd, and, in the second, he will propose to himself, upon the first impulse, a simple variation from even to odd, as did the first simpleton ; but then a second thought will suggest that this is too simple a variation, and finally he will decide upon putting it even as before. I will therefore guess even"—he guesses even, and wins. Now this mode of reasoning in the schoolboy, whom his fellows termed "lucky"—what, in its last analysis, is it ?

'It is merely,' I said, 'an identification of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent.'

'It is,' said Dupin ; 'and upon inquiring of the boy by what means he effected the *thorough* identification in which his success consisted, I received answer as follows :

"When I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is any one, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression." This response of the schoolboy lies at the bottom of all the spurious profundity which has been attributed to Rochefoucauld, to La Bougive, to Machiavelli, and to Campanella.

'And the identification,' I said, 'of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent, depends, if I understand you aright, upon the accuracy with which the opponent's intellect is admeasured.'

'For its practical value it depends upon this,' replied Dupin; 'and the Prefect and his cohort fail so frequently, first, by default of his identification, and, secondly, by ill-admeasurement, or rather through non-admeasurement, of the intellect with which they are engaged. They consider only their *own* ideas of ingenuity; and, in searching for anything hidden, advert only to the modes in which *they* would have hidden it. They are right in this much—that their own ingenuity is a faithful representative of that of *the mass*; but when the cunning of the individual felon is diverse in character from their own, the felon foils them, of course. This always happens when it is above their own, and very usually when it is below. They have no variation of principle in their investigations; at best, when urged by some unusual emergency—by some extraordinary reward—they extend or exaggerate their old modes of *practice*, without touching their principles. What, for example, in this case of D——, has been done to vary the principle of action? What is all this boring, and probing, and sounding, and scrutinising with the microscope, and dividing the surface of the building into registered square inches—what is it all but an exaggeration of *the application* of the one principle or set of principles of search, which are based upon the one set of notions regarding human ingenuity, to which the Prefect, in the long routine of his duty, has

been accustomed? Do you not see he has taken it for granted that *all* men proceed to conceal a letter—not exactly in a gimlet-hole bored in a chair-leg—but, at least, in *some* out-of-the-way hole or corner suggested by the same tenor of thought which would urge a man to secrete a letter in a gimlet-hole bored in a chair-leg? And do you not see also, that such *recherchés* nooks for concealment are adapted only for ordinary occasions, and would be adopted only by ordinary intellects; for, in all cases of concealment, a disposal of the article concealed—a disposal of it in this *recherché* manner—is, in the very first instance, presumable and presumed; and thus its discovery depends, not at all upon the acumen, but altogether upon the mere care, patience, and determination of the seekers; and where the case is of importance—or, what amounts to the same thing in the policial eyes, when the reward is of magnitude—the qualities in question have *never* been known to fail. You will now understand what I meant in suggesting that, had the purloined letter been hidden anywhere within the limits of the Prefect's examination—in other words, had the principle of its concealment been comprehended within the principles of the Prefect—its discovery would have been a matter altogether beyond question. This functionary, however, has been thoroughly mystified; and the remote source of his defeat lies in the supposition that the Minister is a fool, because he has acquired renown as a poet. All fools are poets—this the Prefect *feels*; and he is merely guilty of a *non distributio medii* in thence inferring that all poets are fools.

'But is this really the poet?' I asked. 'There are two brothers, I know; and both have attained reputation in letters. The Minister, I believe, has written learnedly on the Differential Calculus. He is a mathematician, and no poet.'

'You are mistaken; I know him well; he is both. As poet *and* mathematician, he would reason well; as mere mathematician, he could not have reasoned at all, and thus would have been at the mercy of the Prefect.'

'You surprise me,' I said, 'by these opinions, which

have been contradicted by the voice of the world. You do not mean to set at naught the well-digested idea of centuries. The mathematical reason has long been regarded as *the reason par excellence*.'

"*Il y a à parier*," replied Dupin, quoting from Chamfort, "*que toute idée publique, toute convention reçue, est une sottise, car elle a convenue au plus grand nombre*." The mathematicians, I grant you, have done their best to promulgate the popular error to which you allude, and which is none the less an error for its promulgation as truth. With an art worthy a better cause, for example, they have insinuated the term "analysis" into application to algebra. The French are the originators of this particular deception; but if a term is of any importance—if words derive any value from applicability—then "analysis" conveys "algebra" about as much as, in Latin, "*ambitus*" implies "ambition," "*religio*" "religion," or "*homines honesti*" a set of honourable men.'

'You have a quarrel on hand, I see,' said I, 'with some of the algebraists of Paris; but proceed.'

'I dispute the availability, and thus the value, of that reason which is cultivated in any especial form other than the abstractly logical. I dispute, in particular, the reason educated by mathematical study. The mathematics are the science of form and quantity; mathematical reasoning is merely logic applied to observation upon form and quantity. The great error lies in supposing that even the truths of what is called *pure algebra*, are abstract or general truths. And this error is so egregious that I am confounded at the universality with which it has been received. Mathematical axioms are *not* axioms of general truth. What is true of *relation*—of form and quantity—is often grossly false in regard to morals, for example. In this latter science it is very usually *untrue* that the aggregated parts are equal to the whole. In chemistry also the axiom fails. In the consideration of motive it fails; for two motives, each of a given value, have not, necessarily, a value when united, equal to the sum of their values apart. There are numerous other mathematical truths which are only truths within the limits

of relation. But the mathematician argues, from his *finite truths*, through habit, as if they were of an absolutely general applicability—as the world indeed imagines them to be. Bryant, in his very learned “Mythology,” mentions an analogous source of error, when he says that “although the Pagan fables are not believed, yet we forget ourselves continually, and make inferences from them as existing realities.” With the algebraists, however, who are Pagans themselves, the “Pagan fables” *are* believed, and the inferences are made, not so much through lapse of memory, as through an unaccountable addling of the brains. In short, I never yet encountered the mere mathematician who could be trusted out of equal roots, or one who did not clandestinely hold it as a point of his faith that $x^2 + px$ was absolutely and unconditionally equal to q . Say to one of these gentlemen, by way of experiment, if you please, that you believe occasions may occur where $x^2 + px$ is *not* altogether equal to q , and, having made him understand what you mean, get out of his reach as speedily as convenient, for, beyond doubt, he will endeavour to knock you down.

‘I mean to say,’ continued Dupin, while I merely laughed at his last observations, ‘that if the Minister had been no more than a mathematician, the Prefect would have been under no necessity of giving me this cheque. I knew him, however, as both mathematician and poet, and my measures were adapted to his capacity, with reference to the circumstances by which he was surrounded. I knew him as a courtier, too, and as a bold *intrigant*. Such a man, I considered, could not fail to be aware of the ordinary policial modes of action. He could not have failed to anticipate—and events have proved that he did not fail to anticipate—the waylayings to which he was subjected. He must have foreseen, I reflected, the secret investigations of his premises. His frequent absences from home at night, which were hailed by the Prefect as certain aids to his success, I regarded only as ruses, to afford opportunity for thorough search to the police, and thus the sooner to impress them with the conviction to which G——, in fact, did finally arrive

—the conviction that the letter was not upon the premises. I felt, also, that the whole train of thought, which I was at some pains in detailing to you just now, concerning the invariable principle of policial action in searches for articles concealed—I felt that this whole train of thought would necessarily pass through the mind of the Minister. It would imperatively lead him to despise all the ordinary *nooks* of concealment. *He* could not, I reflected, be so weak as not to see that the most intricate and remote recess of his hotel would be as open as his commonest closets to the eyes, to the probes, to the gimlets, and to the microscopes of the Prefect. I saw, in fine, that he would be driven, as a matter of course, to *simplicity*, if not deliberately induced to it as a matter of choice. You will remember, perhaps, how desperately the Prefect laughed when I suggested, upon our first interview, that it was just possible this mystery troubled him so much on account of its being so *very* self-evident.

‘Yes,’ said I, ‘I remember his merriment well. I really thought he would have fallen into convulsions.’

‘The material world,’ continued Dupin, ‘abounds with very strict analogies to the immaterial ; and thus some colour of truth has been given to the rhetorical dogma, that metaphor, or simile, may be made to strengthen an argument, as well as to embellish a description. The principle of the *vis inertiae*, for example, seems to be identical in physics and metaphysics. It is not more true in the former, that a large body is with more difficulty set in motion than a smaller one, and that its subsequent momentum is commensurate with this difficulty, than it is, in the latter, that intellects of the vaster capacity, while more forcible, more constant, and more eventful in their movements than those of inferior grade, are yet the less readily moved, and more embarrassed and full of hesitation in the first few steps of their progress. Again, have you ever noticed which of the street signs over the shop-doors are the most attractive of attention ?’

‘I have never given the matter a thought,’ I said.

‘There is a game of puzzles,’ he resumed, ‘which is

played upon a map. One party playing requires another to find a given word—the name of town, river, state or empire—any word, in short, upon the motley and perplexed surface of the chart. A novice in the game generally seeks to embarrass his opponents by giving them the most minutely lettered names; but the adept selects such words as stretch, in large characters, from one end of the chart to the other. These, like the overlargely lettered signs and placards of the street, escape observation by dint of being excessively obvious; and here the physical oversight is precisely analogous with the moral inapprehension by which the intellect suffers to pass unnoticed those considerations which are too obtrusively and too palpably self-evident. But this is a point, it appears, somewhat above or beneath the understanding of the Prefect. He never once thought it probable, or possible, that the Minister had deposited the letter immediately beneath the nose of the whole world, by way of best preventing any portion of that world from perceiving it.

‘But the more I reflected upon the daring, dashing, and discriminating ingenuity of D——; upon the fact that the document must always have been *at hand*, if he intended to use it to good purpose; and upon the decisive evidence, obtained by the Prefect, that it was not hidden within the limits of that dignitary’s ordinary search—the more satisfied I became that, to conceal this letter, the Minister had resorted to the comprehensive and sagacious expedient of not attempting to conceal it at all.

‘Full of these ideas, I prepared myself with a pair of green spectacles, and called one fine morning, quite by accident, at the Ministerial hotel. I found D—— at home, yawning, lounging, and dawdling, as usual, and pretending to be in the last extremity of *ennui*. He is, perhaps, the most really energetic human being now alive—but that is only when nobody sees him.

‘To be even with him, I complained of my weak eyes, and lamented the necessity of the spectacles, under cover of which I cautiously and thoroughly surveyed the whole

apartment, while seemingly intent only upon the conversation of my host.

‘I paid especial attention to a large writing-table near which he sat, and upon which lay confusedly some miscellaneous letters and other papers, with one or two musical instruments and a few books. Here, however, after a long and very deliberate scrutiny, I saw nothing to excite particular suspicion.

‘At length my eyes, in going the circuit of the room, fell upon a trumpery filigree card-rack of pasteboard, that hung dangling by a dirty blue ribbon, from a little brass knob just beneath the middle of the mantelpiece. In this rack, which had three or four compartments, were five or six visiting cards and a solitary letter. This last was much soiled and crumpled. It was torn nearly in two, across the middle—as if a design, in the first instance, to tear it entirely up as worthless, had been altered, or stayed, in the second. It had a large black seal, bearing the D—— cipher *very* conspicuously, and was addressed, in a diminutive female hand, to D——, the Minister, himself. It was thrust carelessly, and even, as it seemed, contemptuously, into one of the uppermost divisions of the rack.

‘No sooner had I glanced at this letter, than I concluded it to be that of which I was in search. To be sure, it was, to all appearance, radically different from the one of which the Prefect had read us so minute a description. Here the seal was large and black, with the D—— cipher; there it was small and red, with the ducal arms of the S—— family. Here, the address, to the Minister, was diminutive and feminine; there the superscription, to a certain royal personage, was markedly bold and decided; the size alone formed a point of correspondence. But then the *radicalness* of these differences, which was excessive; the dirt; the soiled and torn condition of the paper, so inconsistent with the *true* methodical habits of D——, and so suggestive of a design to delude the beholder into an idea of the worthlessness of the document; these things, together with the hyperobtrusive situation of this document, full in

the view of every visitor, and thus exactly in accordance with the conclusions to which I had previously arrived; these things, I say, were strongly corroborative of suspicion, in one who came with the intention to suspect.

'I protracted my visit as long as possible, and, while I maintained a most animated discussion with the Minister, upon a topic which I knew well had never failed to interest and excite him, I kept my attention really riveted upon the letter. In this examination, I committed to memory its external appearance and arrangement in the rack; and also fell, at length, upon a discovery, which set at rest whatever trivial doubt I might have entertained. In scrutinising the edges of the paper I observed them to be more *chafed* than seemed necessary. They presented the *broken* appearance which is manifested when a stiff paper, having been once folded and pressed with a folder, is refolded in a reversed direction, in the same creases or edges which had formed the original fold. This discovery was sufficient. It was clear to me that the letter had been turned, as a glove, inside out, redirected and resealed. I bade the Minister good-morning, and took my departure at once, leaving a gold snuff-box upon the table.

'The next morning I called for the snuff-box, when we resumed, quite eagerly, the conversation of the preceding day. While thus engaged, however, a loud report, as if of a pistol, was heard immediately beneath the windows of the hotel, and was succeeded by a series of fearful screams, and the shoutings of a terrified mob. D—— rushed to a casement, threw it open, and looked out. In the meantime, I stepped to the card-rack, took the letter, put it in my pocket, and replaced it by a *fac-simile* (so far as regards externals) which I had carefully prepared at my lodgings—imitating the D—— cipher, very readily, by means of a seal formed of bread.

'The disturbance in the street had been occasioned by the frantic behaviour of a man with a musket. He had fired it among a crowd of women and children. It proved, however, to have been without ball, and the

fellow was suffered to go his way as a lunatic or a drunkard. When he had gone, D—— came from the window, whither I had followed him immediately upon securing the object in view. Soon afterwards I bade him farewell. The pretended lunatic was a man in my own pay.'

'But what purpose had you,' I asked, 'in replacing the letter by a fac-simile? Would it not have been better, at the first visit, to have seized it openly, and departed?'

'D——,' replied Dupin, 'is a desperate man, and a man of nerve. His hotel, too, is not without attendants devoted to his interests. Had I made the wild attempt you suggest, I might never have left the Ministerial presence alive. The good people of Paris might have heard of me no more. But I had an object apart from these considerations. You know my political prepossessions. In this matter, I act as a partisan of the lady concerned. For eighteen months the Minister has had her in his power. She has now him in hers—since, being unaware that the letter is not in his possession, he will proceed with his exactions as if it was. Thus will he inevitably commit himself, at once, to his political destruction. His downfall, too, will not be more precipitate than awkward. It is all very well to talk about the *facilis descensus Averni*; but in all kinds of climbing, as Catalani said of singing, it is far more easy to get up than to come down. In the present instance I have no sympathy—at least no pity—for him who descends. He is that *monstrum horrendum*, an unprincipled man of genius. I confess, however, that I should like very well to know the precise character of his thoughts, when, being defied by her whom the Prefect terms "a certain personage," he is reduced to opening the letter which I left for him in the card-rack.'

'How? did you put anything particular in it?'

'Why—it did not seem altogether right to leave the interior blank—that would have been insulting. D——, at Vienna once, did me an evil turn, which I told him, quite good-humouredly, that I should remember. So, as I knew he would feel some curiosity in regard to the

identity of the person who had outwitted him, I thought it a pity not to give him a clew. He is well acquainted with my MS., and I just copied into the middle of the blank sheet the words :—

‘ “——Un dessein si funeste,
S’il n’est digne d’Atrée, est digne de Thyeste.”

They are to be found in Crébillon’s “Atrée.”

ELIZABETH C. GASKELL

1810-1865

THE SEXTON'S HERO

THE afternoon sun shed down his glorious rays on the grassy churchyard, making the shadow, cast by the old yew-tree under which we sat, seem deeper and deeper by contrast. The everlasting hum of myriads of summer insects made luxurious lullaby.

Of the view that lay beneath our gaze, I cannot speak adequately. The foreground was the grey-stone wall of the Vicarage garden; rich in the colouring made by innumerable lichens, ferns, ivy of most tender green and most delicate tracery, and the vivid scarlet of the crane's-bill, which found a home in every nook and crevice—and at the summit of that old wall flaunted some unpruned tendrils of the vine, and long flower-laden branches of the climbing rose-tree, trained against the inner side. Beyond, lay meadow green and mountain grey, and the blue dazzle of Morecambe Bay, as it sparkled between us and the more distant view.

For a while we were silent, living in sight and murmuring sound. Then Jeremy took up our conversation where, suddenly feeling weariness, as we saw that deep green shadowy resting-place, we had ceased speaking a quarter of an hour before.

It is one of the luxuries of holiday-time that thoughts are not rudely shaken from us by outward violence of hurry and busy impatience, but fall maturely from our lips in the sunny leisure of our days. The stock may be bad, but the fruit is ripe.

'How would you then define a hero?' I asked.

There was a long pause, and I had almost forgotten my question in watching a cloud-shadow floating over the far-away hills, when Jeremy made answer—

‘My idea of a hero is one who acts up to the highest idea of duty he has been able to form, no matter at what sacrifice. I think that by this definition we may include all phases of character, even to the heroes of old, whose sole (and to us, low) idea of duty consisted in personal prowess.’

‘Then you would even admit the military heroes?’ asked I.

‘I would; with a certain kind of pity for the circumstances which had given them no higher ideas of duty. Still, if they sacrificed self to do what they sincerely believed to be right, I do not think I could deny them the title of hero.’

‘A poor, unchristian heroism, whose manifestation consists in injury to others!’ I said.

We were both startled by a third voice.

‘If I might make so bold, sir’—and then the speaker stopped.

It was the Sexton, whom, when we first arrived, we had noticed, as an accessory to the scene, but whom we had forgotten, as much as though he were as inanimate as one of the moss-covered headstones.

‘If I might be so bold,’ said he again, waiting leave to speak. Jeremy bowed in deference to his white, uncovered head. And so encouraged, he went on.

‘What that gentleman’ (alluding to my last speech) ‘has just now said, brings to my mind one who is dead and gone this many a year ago. I, may be, have not rightly understood your meaning, gentlemen, but as far as I could gather it, I think you’d both have given in to thinking poor Gilbert Dawson a hero. At any rate,’ said he, heaving a long, quivering sigh, ‘I have reason to think him so.’

‘Will you take a seat, sir, and tell us about him?’ said Jeremy, standing up until the old man was seated. I confess I felt impatient at the interruption.

‘It will be forty-five year come Martinmas,’ said the

Sexton, sitting down on a grassy mound at our feet, 'since I finished my 'prenticeship, and settled down at Lindal. You can see Lindal, sir, at evenings and mornings across the bay ; a little to the right of Grange ; at least, I used to see it, many a time and oft, afore my sight grew so dark : and I have spent many a quarter of an hour a-gazing at it far away, and thinking of the days I lived there, till the tears came so thick to my eyes, I could gaze no longer. I shall never look upon it again, either far off or near, but you may see it, both ways, and a terrible bonny spot it is. In my young days, when I went to settle there, it was full of as wild a set of young fellows as ever were clapped eyes on ; all for fighting, poaching, quarrelling, and suchlike work. I were startled myself when I first found what a set I were among, but soon I began to fall into their ways, and I ended by being as rough a chap as any on 'em. I'd been there a matter of two year, and were reckoned by most the cock of the village, when Gilbert Dawson, as I was speaking of, came to Lindal. He were about as strapping a chap as I was (I used to be six feet high, though now I'm so shrunk and doubled up), and, as we were like in the same trade (both used to prepare osiers and wood for the Liverpool coopers, who get a deal of stuff from the copses round the bay, sir), we were thrown together, and took mightily to each other. I put my best leg foremost to be equal with Gilbert, for I'd had some schooling, though since I'd been at Lindal I'd lost a good part of what I'd learnt ; and I kept my rough ways out of sight for a time, I felt so ashamed of his getting to know them. But that did not last long. I began to think he fancied a girl I dearly loved, but who had always held off from me. Eh ! but she was a pretty one in those days ! There's none like her, now. I think I see her going along the road with her dancing tread, and shaking back her long yellow curls, to give me or any other young fellow a saucy word ; no wonder Gilbert was taken with her, for all he was grave, and she so merry and light. But I began to think she liked him again ; and then my blood was all afire. I got to hate him for everything he

did. Aforetime I had stood by, admiring to see him, how he leapt, and what a quoter and cricketer he was. And now I ground my teeth with hatred whene'er he did a thing which caught Letty's eye. I could read it in her look that she liked him, for all she held herself just as high with him as with all the rest. Lord God forgive me! how I hated that man.'

He spoke as if the hatred were a thing of yesterday, so clear within his memory were shown the actions and feelings of his youth. And then he dropped his voice and said—

'Well! I began to look out to pick a quarrel with him, for my blood was up to fight him. If I beat him (and I were a rare boxer in those days), I thought Letty would cool towards him. So one evening at quoits (I'm sure I don't know how or why, but large doings grow out of small words) I fell out with him, and challenged him to fight. I could see he were very wroth by his colour coming and going—and, as I said before, he were a fine active young fellow. But all at once he drew in, and said he would not fight. Such a yell as the Lindal lads, who were watching us, set up! I hear it yet. I could na' help but feel sorry for him, to be so scorned, and I thought he'd not rightly taken my meaning, and I'd give him another chance; so I said it again, and dared him, as plain as words could speak, to fight out the quarrel. He told me then, he had no quarrel against me; that he might have said something to put me up; he did not know that he had, but that if he had, he asked pardon; but that he would not fight no-how.

'I was so full of scorn at his cowardliness, that I was vexed I'd given him the second chance, and I joined in the yell that was set up, twice as bad as before. He stood it out, his teeth set, and looking very white, and when we were silent for want of breath, he said out loud, but in a hoarse voice, quite different from his own—

"I cannot fight, because I think it is wrong to quarrel, and use violence."

'Then he turned to go away; I were so beside myself with scorn and hate, that I called out—

"Tell truth, lad, at least; if thou dare not fight, dunnot go and tell a lie about it. Mother's moppet is afraid of a black eye, pretty dear. It shannot be hurt, but it munnot tell lies."

"Well, they laughed, but I could not laugh. It seemed such a thing for a stout young chap to be a coward, and afraid!

"Before the sun had set, it was talked of all over Lindal, how I had challenged Gilbert to fight, and how he'd denied me; and the folks stood at their doors, and looked at him going up the hill to his home, as if he'd been a monkey or a foreigner—but no one wished him good e'en. Such a thing as refusing to fight had never been heard of afore at Lindal. Next day, however, they had found voice. The men muttered the word "coward" in his hearing, and kept aloof; the women tittered as he passed, and the little impudent lads and lasses shouted out, "How long is it sin' thou turned Quaker?" "Good-bye, Jonathan Broad-brim," and suchlike jests.

"That evening I met him, with Letty by his side, coming up from the shore. She was almost crying as I came upon them at the turn of the lane; and looking up in his face, as if begging him something. And so she was, she told me it after. For she did really like him; and could not abide to hear him scorned by every one for being a coward; and she, coy as she was, all but told him that very night that she loved him, and begged him not to disgrace himself, but fight me as I'd dared him to. When he still stuck to it he could not, for that it was wrong, she was so vexed and mad-like at the way she'd spoken, and the feelings she'd let out to coax him, that she said more stinging things about his being a coward than all the rest put together (according to what she told me, sir, afterwards), and ended by saying she'd never speak to him again, as long as she lived; she did once again, though—her blessing was the last human speech that reached his ear in his wild death-struggle.

"But much happened afore that time. From the day I met them walking, Letty turned towards me; I could see a part of it was to spite Gilbert, for she'd be twice as

kind when he was near, or likely to hear of it ; but by and by she got to like me for my own sake, and it was all settled for our marriage. Gilbert kept aloof from every one, and fell into a sad, careless way. His very gait was changed ; his step used to be brisk and sounding, and now his foot lingered heavily on the ground. I used to try and daunt him with my eye, but he would always meet my look in a steady, quiet way, for all so much about him was altered ; the lads would not play with him ; and as soon as he found he was to be slighted by them whenever he came to quoiting or cricket, he just left off coming.

‘The old clerk was the only one he kept company with ; or perhaps, rightly to speak, the only one who would keep company with him. They got so thick at last, that old Jonas would say, Gilbert had gospel on his side, and did no more than gospel told him to do ; but we none of us gave much credit to what he said, more by token our vicar had a brother, a colonel in the army ; and as we threeped it many a time to Jonas, would he set himself up to know the gospel better than the vicar ? that would be putting the cart afore the horse, like the French radicals. And if the vicar had thought quarrelling and fighting wicked, and again the Bible, would he have made so much work about all the victories, that were as plenty as blackberries at that time of day, and kept the little bell of Lindal church for ever ringing ; or would he have thought so much of “my brother the colonel,” as he was always talking on ?

‘After I was married to Letty I left off hating Gilbert. I even kind of pitied him—he was so scorned and slighted ; and for all he’d a bold look about him, as if he were not ashamed, he seemed pining and shrunk. It’s a wearying thing to be kept at arm’s length by one’s kind ; and so Gilbert found it, poor fellow. The little children took to him, though ; they be round about him like a swarm of bees—they as was too young to know what a coward was, and only felt that he was ever ready to love and to help them, and was never loud or cross, however naughty they might be. After a while we had our little one, too ;

such a blessed darling she was, and dearly did we love her ; Letty in especial, who seemed to get all the thought I used to think sometimes she wanted, after she had her baby to care for.

'All my kin lived on this side the bay, up above Kellet. Jane (that's her that lies buried near yon white rose-tree) was to be married, and naught would serve her but that Letty and I must come to the wedding ; for all my sisters loved Letty, she had such winning ways with her. Letty did not like to leave her baby, nor yet did I want her to take it : so, after a talk, we fixed to leave it with Letty's mother for the afternoon. I could see her heart ached a bit, for she'd never left it till then, and she seemed to fear all manner of evil, even to the French coming and taking it away. Well ! we borrowed a shandry, and harnessed my old grey mare, as I used in th' cart, and set off as grand as King George across the sands about three o'clock, for you see it were high-water about twelve, and we'd to go and come back same tide, as Letty could not leave her baby for long. It were a merry afternoon, were that ; last time I ever saw Letty laugh heartily ; and, for that matter, last time I ever laughed downright hearty myself. The latest crossing-time fell about nine o'clock, and we were late at starting. Clocks were wrong ; and we'd a piece of work chasing a pig father had given Letty to take home ; we bagged him at last, and he screeched and screeched in the back part o' th' shandry, and we laughed and they laughed ; and in the midst of all the merriment the sun set, and that sobered us a bit, for then we knew what time it was. I whipped the old mare, but she was a deal beener than she was in the morning, and would neither go quick up nor down the brows, and they're not a few 'twixt Kellet and the shore. On the sands it were worse. They were very heavy, for the fresh had come down after the rains we'd had. Lord ! how I did whip the poor mare, to make the most of the red light as yet lasted. You, maybe, don't know the sands, gentlemen. From Bolton side, where we started from, it is better than six mile to Cart Lane, and two channels to cross, let alone holes and

quicksands. At the second channel from us the guide waits, all during crossing-time from sunrise to sunset ; but for the three hours on each side high-water he's not there, in course. He stays after sunset if he's forespoken, not else. So now you know where we were that awful night. For we'd crossed the first channel about two mile, and it were growing darker and darker above and around us, all but one red line of light above the hills, when we came to a hollow (for all the sands look so flat, there's many a hollow in them where you lose all sight of the shore). We were longer than we should ha' been in crossing the hollow, the sand was so quick ; and when we came up again, there, again the blackness, was the white line of the rushing tide coming up the bay ! It looked not a mile from us ; and when the wind blows up the bay it comes swifter than a galloping horse. " Lord help us ! " said I ; and then I were sorry I'd spoken, to frighten Letty ; but the words were crushed out of my heart by the terror. I felt her shiver up by my side, and clutch my coat. And as if the pig (as had screeched himself hoarse some time ago) had found out the danger we were all in, he took to squealing again, enough to bewilder any man. I cursed him between my teeth for his noise ; and yet it was God's answer to my prayer, blind sinner as I was. Aye ! you may smile, sir, but God can work through many a scornful thing, if need be.

' By this time the mare was all in a lather, and trembling and panting, as if in mortal fright ; for though we were on the last bank afore the second channel, the water was gathering up her legs ; and she so tired out ! When we came close to the channel she stood still, and not all my flogging could get her to stir ; she fairly groaned aloud, and shook in a terrible quaking way. Till now Letty had not spoken ; only held my coat tightly. I heard her say something, and bent down my head.

" I think, John—I think—I shall never see baby again ! "

' And then she sent up such a cry—so loud, and shrill, and pitiful ! It fairly maddened me. I pulled out my knife to spur on the old mare, that it might end one way

or the other, for the water was stealing sullenly up to the very axle-tree, let alone the white waves that knew no mercy in their steady advance. That one quarter of an hour, sir, seemed as long as all my life since. Thoughts, and fancies, and dreams, and memory ran into each other. The mist, the heavy mist, that was like a ghastly curtain, shutting us in for death, seemed to bring with it the scents of the flowers that grew around our own threshold ; it might be, for it was falling on them like blessed dew, though to us it was a shroud. Letty told me after, she heard her baby crying for her, above the gurgling of the rising waters, as plain as ever she heard anything ; but the sea-birds were skirling, and the pig shrieking ; I never caught it ; it was miles away, at any rate.

‘Just as I’d gotten my knife out, another sound was close upon us, blending with the gurgle of the near waters, and the roar of the distant (not so distant though) ; we could hardly see, but we thought we saw something black against the deep lead colour of wave, and mist, and sky. It neared and neared : with slow, steady motion, it came across the channel right to where we were.

‘Oh, God ! it was Gilbert Dawson on his strong bay horse.

‘Few words did we speak, and little time had we to say them in. I had no knowledge at that moment of past or future—only of one present thought—how to save Letty, and, if I could, myself. I only remembered afterwards that Gilbert said he had been guided by an animal’s shriek of terror ; I only heard, when all was over, that he had been uneasy about our return, because of the depth of fresh, and had borrowed a pillion, and saddled his horse early in the evening, and ridden down to Cart Lane to watch for us. If all had gone well, we should ne’er have heard of it. As it was, old Jonas told it, the tears down-dropping from his withered cheeks.

‘We fastened his horse to the shandry. We lifted Letty to the pillion. The waters rose every instant with sullen sound. They were all but in the shandry. Letty clung to the pillion handles, but drooped her head as if she had yet no hope of life. Swifter than thought (and

yet he might have had time for thought and for temptation, sir—if he had ridden off with Letty, he would have been saved, not me), Gilbert was in the shandry by my side.

“Quick!” said he, clear and firm. “You must ride before her, and keep her up. The horse can swim. By God’s mercy I will follow. I can cut the traces, and if the mare is not hampered with the shandry, she’ll carry me safely through. At any rate, you are a husband and a father. No one cares for me.”

“Do not hate me, gentlemen. I often wish that night was a dream. It has haunted my sleep ever since like a dream, and yet it was no dream. I took his place on the saddle, and put Letty’s arms around me, and felt her head rest on my shoulder. I trust in God I spoke some word of thanks; but I can’t remember. I only recollect Letty raising her head, and calling out—

“God bless you, Gilbert Dawson, for saving my baby from being an orphan this night.” And then she fell against me, as if unconscious.

“I bore her through; or, rather, the strong horse swam bravely through the gathering waves. We were dripping wet when we reached the banks in-shore; but we could have but one thought—where was Gilbert? Thick mists and heaving waters compassed us round. Where was he? We shouted. Letty, faint as she was, raised her voice and shouted clear and shrill. No answer came, the sea boomed on with ceaseless sullen beat. I rode to the guide’s house. He was a-bed, and would not get up, though I offered him more than I was worth. Perhaps he knew it, the cursed old villain! At any rate, I’d have paid it if I’d toiled my life long. He said I might take his horn and welcome. I did, and blew such a blast through the still, black night, the echoes came back upon the heavy air: but no human voice or sound was heard—that wild blast could not awaken the dead!

“I took Letty home to her baby, over whom she wept the livelong night. I rode back to the shore about Cart Lane; and to and fro, with weary march, did I pace along the brink of the waters, now and then shouting out

into the silence a vain cry for Gilbert. The waters went back and left no trace. Two days afterwards he was washed ashore near Flukeborough. The shandry and poor old mare were found half-buried in a heap of sand by Arnside Knott. As far as we could guess, he had dropped his knife while trying to cut the traces, and so had lost all chance of life. Any rate, the knife was found in a cleft of the shaft.

'His friends came over from Garstang to his funeral. I wanted to go chief mourner, but it was not my right, and I might not; though I've never done mourning him to this day. When his sister packed up his things, I begged hard for something that had been his. She would give me none of his clothes (she was a right-down having woman), as she had boys of her own, who might grow up into them. But she threw me his Bible, as she said they'd gotten one already, and his were but a poor used-up thing. It was his, and so I cared for it. It were a black leather one, with pockets at the sides, old-fashioned-wise; and in one were a bunch of wild flowers, Letty said she could almost be sure were some she had once given him.

'There were many a text in the Gospel, marked broad with his carpenter's pencil, which more than bore him out in his refusal to fight. Of a surety, sir, there's call enough for bravery in the service of God, and to show love to man, without quarrelling and fighting.

'Thank you, gentlemen, for listening to me. Your words called up the thoughts of him, and my heart was full to speaking. But I must make up; I've to dig a grave for a little child, who is to be buried to-morrow morning, just when his playmates are trooping off to school.

'But tell us of Letty; is she yet alive?' asked Jeremy.

The old man shook his head, and struggled against a choking sigh. After a minute's pause he said—

'She died in less than two year at after that night. She was never like the same again. She would sit thinking, on Gilbert, I guessed: but I could not blame

her. We had a boy, and we named it Gilbert Dawson Knipe; he that's stoker on the London railway. Our girl was carried off in teething; and Letty just quietly drooped, and died in less than a six week. They were buried here; so I came to be near them, and away from Lindal, a place I could never abide after Letty was gone.'

He turned to his work, and we, having rested sufficiently, rose up, and came away.

BRET HARTE

1839-1902

THE LEGEND OF MONTE DEL DIABLO

FOR many years after Father Junipero Serro first rang his bell in the wilderness of Upper California, the spirit which animated that adventurous priest did not wane. The conversion of the heathen went on rapidly in the establishment of Missions throughout the land. So sedulously did the good Fathers set about their work, that around their isolated chapels there presently arose *adobe* huts, whose mud-plastered and savage tenants partook regularly of the provisions, and occasionally of the Sacrament, of their pious hosts. Nay, so great was their progress, that one zealous Padre is reported to have administered the Lord's Supper one Sabbath morning to 'over three hundred heathen Salvages.' It was not to be wondered that the Enemy of Souls, being greatly incensed thereat, and alarmed at his decreasing popularity, should have grievously tempted and embarrassed these holy Fathers, as we shall presently see.

Yet they were happy, peaceful days for California. The vagrant keels of prying Commerce had not as yet ruffled the lordly gravity of her bays. No torn and ragged gulch betrayed the suspicion of golden treasure. The wild oats drooped idly in the morning heat or wrestled with the afternoon breezes. Deer and antelope dotted the plain. The watercourses brawled in their familiar channels, nor dreamed of ever shifting their regular tide. The wonders of the Yosemite and Calaveras were as yet unrecorded. The holy Fathers noted little of the landscape beyond the barbaric prodigality with which the

quick soil repaid the sowing. A new conversion, the advent of a saint's day, or the baptism of an Indian baby, was at once the chronicle and marvel of their day.

At this blissful epoch there lived at the Mission of San Pablo Father José Antonio Haro, a worthy brother of the Society of Jesus. He was of tall and cadaverous aspect. A somewhat romantic history had given a poetic interest to his lugubrious visage. While a youth pursuing his studies at famous Salamanca, he had become enamoured of the charms of Doña Carmen de Torrencevara, as that lady passed to her matutinal devotions. Untoward circumstances, hastened, perhaps, by a wealthier suitor, brought this amour to a disastrous issue, and Father José entered a monastery, taking upon himself the vows of celibacy. It was here that his natural fervour and poetic enthusiasm conceived expression as a missionary. A longing to convert the uncivilized heathen succeeded his frivolous earthly passion, and a desire to explore and develop unknown fastnesses continually possessed him. In his flashing eye and sombre exterior was detected a singular commingling of the discreet Las Casas and the impetuous Balboa.

Fired by this pious zeal, Father José went forward in the van of Christian pioneers. On reaching Mexico, he obtained authority to establish the Mission of San Pablo. Like the good Junipero, accompanied only by an acolyte and muleteer, he unsaddled his mules in a dusky cañon, and rang his bell in the wilderness. The savages—a peaceful, inoffensive, and inferior race—presently flocked around him. The nearest military post was far away, which contributed much to the security of these pious pilgrims, who found their open trustfulness and amiability better fitted to repress hostility than the presence of an armed, suspicious, and brawling soldiery. So the good Father José said matins and prime, mass and vespers, in the heart of sin and heathenism, taking no heed to himself, but looking only to the welfare of the Holy Church. Conversions soon followed, and on the 7th of July, 1760, the first Indian baby was baptized,—an event which, as Father José piously records, exceeds

the riches of gold or precious jewels or the chancing upon the Ophir of Solomon.' I quote this incident as best suited to show the ingenious blending of poetry and piety which distinguished Father José's record.

The Mission of San Pablo progressed and prospered, until the pious founder thereof, like the infidel Alexander, might have wept that there were no more heathen worlds to conquer. But his ardent and enthusiastic spirit could not long brook an idleness that seemed begotten of sin ; and one pleasant August morning, in the year of grace 1770, Father José issued from the outer court of the Mission building, equipped to explore the field for new missionary labours.

Nothing could exceed the quiet gravity and unpretentiousness of the little cavalcade. First rode a stout muleteer, leading a pack-mule laden with the provisions of the party, together with a few cheap crucifixes and hawks' bells. After him came the devout Padre José, bearing his breviary and cross, with a black *serapa* thrown around his shoulders ; while on either side trotted a dusky convert, anxious to show a proper sense of their regeneration by acting as guides into the wilds of their heathen brethren. Their new condition was agreeably shown by the absence of the usual mud-plaster, which in their unconverted state they assumed to keep away vermin and cold. The morning was bright and propitious. Before their departure, mass had been said in the chapel, and the protection of St. Ignatius invoked against all contingent evils, but especially against bears, which, like the fiery dragons of old, seemed to cherish unconquerable hostility to the Holy Church.

As they wound through the cañon, charming birds disported upon boughs and sprays, and sober quails piped from the alders ; the willowy watercourses gave a musical utterance, and the long grass whispered on the hillside. On entering the deeper defiles, above them towered dark green masses of pine, and occasionally the *madroño* shook its bright scarlet berries. As they toiled up many a steep ascent, Father José sometimes picked up fragments of scoria, which spake to his imagination of

direful volcanoes and impending earthquakes. To the less scientific mind of the muleteer Ignacio they had even a more terrifying significance; and he once or twice snuffed the air suspiciously, and declared that it smelt of sulphur. So the first day of their journey wore away, and at night they encamped without having met a single heathen face.

It was on this night that the Enemy of Souls appeared to Ignacio in an appalling form. He had retired to a secluded part of the camp and had sunk upon his knees in prayerful meditation, when he looked up and perceived the Arch-Fiend in the likeness of a monstrous bear. The Evil One was seated on his hind legs immediately before him, with his fore-paws joined together just below his black muzzle. Wisely conceiving this remarkable attitude to be in mockery and derision of his devotions, the worthy muleteer was transported with fury. Seizing an arquebuse, he instantly closed his eyes and fired. When he had recovered from the effects of the terrific discharge, the apparition had disappeared. Father José, awakened by the report, reached the spot only in time to chide the muleteer for wasting powder and ball in a contest with one whom a single ave would have been sufficient to utterly discomfit. What further reliance he placed on Ignacio's story is not known; but, in commemoration of a worthy Californian custom, the place was called *La Cañada de la Tentacion del Pio Muletero*, or 'The Glen of the Temptation of the Pious Muleteer,' a name which it retains to this day.

The next morning the party, issuing from a narrow gorge, came upon a long valley, sear and burnt with the shadeless heat. Its lower extremity was lost in a fading line of low hills, which, gathering might and volume toward the upper end of the valley, upheaved a stupendous bulwark against the breezy north. The peak of this awful spur was just touched by a fleecy cloud that shifted to and fro like a banneret. Father José gazed at it with mingled awe and admiration. By a singular coincidence, the muleteer Ignacio uttered the simple ejaculation '*Diablo!*'

As they penetrated the valley, they soon began to miss the agreeable life and companionable echoes of the cañon they had quitted. Huge fissures in the parched soil seemed to gape as with thirsty mouths. A few squirrels darted from the earth, and disappeared as mysteriously before the jingling mules. A grey wolf trotted leisurely along just ahead. But whichever way Father José turned, the mountain always asserted itself and arrested his wandering eye. Out of the dry and arid vally it seemed to spring into cooler and bracing life. Deep cavernous shadows dwelt along its base; rocky fastnesses appeared midway of its elevation; and on either side huge black hills diverged like massy roots from a central trunk. His lively fancy pictured these hills peopled with a majestic and intelligent race of savages; and looking into futurity, he already saw a monstrous cross crowning the dome-like summit. Far different were the sensations of the muleteer, who saw in those awful solitudes only fiery dragons, colossal bears, and breakneck trails. The converts, Concepcion and Incarnacion, trotting modestly beside the Padre, recognized, perhaps, some manifestation of their former weird mythology.

At nightfall they reached the base of the mountain. Here Father José unpacked his mules, said vespers, and, formally ringing his bell, called upon the Gentiles within hearing to come and accept the Holy Faith. The echoes of the black frowning hills around him caught up the pious invitation, and repeated it at intervals; but no Gentiles appeared that night. Nor were the devotions of the muleteer again disturbed, although he afterward asserted that, when the Father's exhortation was ended, a mocking peal of laughter came from the mountain. Nothing daunted by these intimations of the near hostility of the Evil One, Father José declared his intention to ascend the mountain at early dawn, and before the sun rose the next morning he was leading the way.

The ascent was in many places difficult and dangerous. Huge fragments of rock often lay across the trail, and after a few hours' climbing they were forced to leave

their mules in a little gully, and continue the ascent afoot. Unaccustomed to such exertion, Father José often stopped to wipe the perspiration from his thin cheeks. As the day wore on, a strange silence oppressed them. Except the occasional pattering of a squirrel, or a rustling in the *chimisal* bushes, there were no signs of life. The half-human print of a bear's foot sometimes appeared before them, at which Ignacio always crossed himself piously. The eye was sometimes cheated by a dripping from the rocks, which on closer inspection proved to be a resinous oily liquid with an abominable sulphurous smell. When they were within a short distance of the summit, the discreet Ignacio, selecting a sheltered nook for the camp, slipped aside and busied himself in preparations for the evening, leaving the holy Father to continue the ascent alone. Never was there a more thoughtless act of prudence, never a more imprudent piece of caution. Without noticing the desertion, buried in pious reflection, Father José pushed mechanically on, and, reaching the summit, cast himself down and gazed upon the prospect.

Below him lay a succession of valleys opening into each other like gentle lakes, until they were lost to the southward. Westerly the distant range hid the bosky *cañada* which sheltered the Mission of San Pablo. In the farther distance the Pacific Ocean stretched away, bearing a cloud of fog upon its bosom, which crept through the entrance of the bay, and rolled thickly between him and the north-eastward; the same fog hid the base of mountain and the view beyond. Still, from time to time the fleecy veil parted, and timidly disclosed charming glimpses of mighty rivers, mountain defiles, and rolling plains, sear with ripened oats, and bathed in the glow of the setting sun. As Father José gazed, he was penetrated with a pious longing. Already his imagination, filled with enthusiastic conceptions, beheld all that vast expanse gathered under the mild sway of the Holy Faith, and peopled with zealous converts. Each little knoll in fancy became crowned with a chapel; from each dark cañon gleamed the white walls of a Mission building.

Growing bolder in his enthusiasm and looking farther into futurity, he beheld a new Spain rising on these savage shores. He already saw the spires of stately cathedrals, the domes of palaces, vineyards, gardens, and groves. Convents, half hid among the hills, peeping from plantations of branching limes ; and long processions of chanting nuns wound through the defiles. So completely was the good Father's conception of the future confounded with the past, that even in their choral strain the well-remembered accents of *Cármén* struck his ear. He was busied in these fanciful imaginings, when suddenly over that extended prospect the faint distant tolling of a bell rang sadly out and died. It was the *Angelus*. Father José listened with superstitious exaltation. The Mission of San Pablo was far away, and the sound must have been some miraculous omen. But never before, to his enthusiastic sense, did the sweet seriousness of this angelic symbol come with such strange significance. With the last faint peal, his glowing fancy seemed to cool ; the fog closed in below him, and the good Father remembered he had not had his supper. He had risen and was wrapping his *serapa* around him, when he perceived for the first time that he was not alone.

Nearly opposite, and where should have been the faithless Ignacio, a grave and decorous figure was seated. His appearance was that of an elderly *hidalgo*, dressed in mourning, with moustaches of iron-grey carefully waxed and twisted around a pair of lantern-jaws. The monstrous hat and prodigious feather, the enormous ruff and exaggerated trunk-hose contrasted with a frame shrivelled and wizened, all belonged to a century previous. Yet Father José was not astonished. His adventurous life and poetic imagination, continually on the look-out for the marvellous, gave him a certain advantage over the practical and material minded. He instantly detected the diabolical quality of his visitant, and was prepared. With equal coolness and courtesy he met the cavalier's obeisance.

'I ask your pardon, Sir Priest,' said the stranger, 'for disturbing your meditations. Pleasant they must

have been, and right fanciful, I imagine, when occasioned by so fair a prospect.'

'Worldly, perhaps, Sir Devil,—for such I take you to be,' said the holy Father, as the stranger bowed his black plumes to the ground; 'worldly, perhaps; for it hath pleased Heaven to retain even in our regenerated state much that pertaineth to the flesh, yet still, I trust, not without some speculation for the welfare of the Holy Church. In dwelling upon yon fair expanse, mine eyes have been graciously opened with prophetic inspiration, and the promise of the heathen as an inheritance hath marvellously recurred to me. For there can be none lack such diligence in the True Faith but may see that even the conversion of these pitiful salvages hath a meaning. As the blessed St. Ignatius discreetly observes,' continued Father José, clearing his throat and slightly elevating his voice, "'the heathen is given to the warriors of Christ, even as the pearls of rare discovery which gladden the hearts of shipmen.'" Nay, I might say——'

But here the stranger, who had been wrinkling his brows and twisting his moustaches with well-bred patience, took advantage of an oratorical pause.

'It grieves me, Sir Priest, to interrupt the current of your eloquence as discourteously as I have already broken your meditations; but the day already waneth to night. I have a matter of serious import to make with you, could I entreat your cautious consideration a few moments.'

Father José hesitated. The temptation was great, and the prospect of acquiring some knowledge of the Great Enemy's plans not the least trifling object. And, if the truth must be told, there was a certain decorum about the stranger that interested the Padre. Though well aware of the Protean shapes the Arch-Fiend could assume, and though free from the weaknesses of the flesh, Father José was not above the temptations of the spirit. Had the Devil appeared, as in the case of the pious St. Anthony, in the likeness of a comely damsel, the good Father, with his certain experience of the deceitful sex, would have whisked her away in the saying of a pater-

noster. But there was, added to the security of age, a grave sadness about the stranger,—a thoughtful consciousness, as of being at a great moral disadvantage,—which at once decided him on a magnanimous course of conduct.

The stranger then proceeded to inform him, that he had been diligently observing the holy Father's triumphs in the valley. That, far from being greatly exercised thereat, he had been only grieved to see so enthusiastic and chivalrous an antagonist wasting his zeal in a hopeless work. For, he observed, the issue of the great battle of Good and Evil had been otherwise settled, as he would presently show him. 'It wants but a few moments of night,' he continued, 'and over this interval of twilight, as you know, I have been given complete control. Look to the west.'

As the Padre turned, the stranger took his enormous hat from his head, and waved it three times before him. At each sweep of the prodigious feather the fog grew thinner, until it melted impalpably away, and the former landscape returned, yet warm with the glowing sun. As Father José gazed, a strain of martial music arose from the valley, and issuing from a deep cañon, the good Father beheld a long cavalcade of gallant cavaliers, habited like his companion. As they swept down the plain, they were joined by like processions, that slowly defiled from every ravine and cañon of the mysterious mountain. From time to time the peal of a trumpet swelled fitfully upon the breeze; the cross of Santiago glittered, and the royal banners of Castile and Aragon waved over the moving column. So they moved on solemnly toward the sea, where, in the distance, Father José saw stately caravels, bearing the same familiar banner, awaiting them. The good Padre gazed with conflicting emotions, and the serious voice of the stranger broke the silence.

'Thou hast beheld, Sir Priest, the fading footprints of adventurous Castile. Thou hast seen the declining glory of old Spain,—declining as yonder brilliant sun. The sceptre she hath wrested from the heathen is fast

dropping from her decrepit and fleshless grasp. The children she hath fostered shall know her no longer. The soil she hath acquired shall be lost to her as irrevocably as she herself hath thrust the Moor from her own Granada.'

The stranger paused, and his voice seemed broken by emotion; at the same time, Father José, whose sympathizing heart yearned towards the departing banners, cried in poignant accents—

'Farewell, ye gallant cavaliers and Christian soldiers! Farewell, thou, Nuñes de Balboa! thou, Alonzo de Ojeda! and thou, most venerable Las Casas! farewell, and may Heaven prosper still the seed ye left behind!'

Then turning to the stranger, Father José beheld him gravely draw his pocket-handkerchief from the basket-hilt of his rapier and apply it decorously to his eyes.

'Pardon this weakness, Sir Priest,' said the cavalier apologetically; 'but these worthy gentlemen were ancient friends of mine, and have done me many a delicate service,—much more, perchance, than these poor sables may signify,' he added, with a grim gesture toward the mourning suit he wore.

Father José was too much preoccupied in reflection to notice the equivocal nature of this tribute, and, after a few moments' silence, said, as if continuing his thought—

'But the seed they have planted shall thrive and prosper on this fruitful soil.'

As if answering the interrogatory, the stranger turned to the opposite direction, and, again waving his hat, said, in the same serious tone—

'Look to the east!'

The Father turned, and, as the fog broke away before the waving plume, he saw that the sun was rising. Issuing with its bright beams through the passes of the snowy mountains beyond appeared a strange and motley crew. Instead of the dark and romantic visages of his last phantom train, the Father beheld with strange concern the blue eyes and flaxen hair of a Saxon race. In place of martial airs and musical utterances, there rose upon the ear a strange din of harsh gutturals and singular

sibilation. Instead of the decorous tread and stately mien of the cavaliers of the former vision, they came pushing, bustling, panting, and swaggering. And as they passed, the good Father noticed that giant trees were prostrated as with the breath of a tornado, and the bowels of the earth were torn and rent as with a convulsion. And Father José looked in vain for holy cross or Christian symbol; there was but one that seemed an ensign, and he crossed himself with holy horror as he perceived it bore the effigy of a bear.

'Who are these swaggering Ishmaelites?' he asked, with something of asperity in his tone.

The stranger was gravely silent.

'What do they here, with neither cross nor holy symbol?' he again demanded.

'Have you the courage to see, Sir Priest?' responded the stranger quietly.

Father José felt his crucifix, as a lonely traveller might his rapier, and assented.

'Step under the shadow of my plume,' said the stranger.

Father José stepped beside him, and they instantly sank through the earth.

When he opened his eyes, which had remained closed in prayerful meditation during his rapid descent, he found himself in a vast vault, bespangled overhead with luminous points like the starred firmament. It was also lighted by a yellow glow that seemed to proceed from a mighty sea or lake that occupied the centre of the chamber. Around this subterranean sea dusky figures flitted, bearing ladles filled with the yellow fluid, which they had replenished from its depths. From this lake diverging streams of the same mysterious flood penetrated like mighty rivers the cavernous distance. As they walked by the banks of this glittering Styx, Father José perceived how the liquid stream at certain places became solid. The ground was strewn with glittering flakes. One of these the Padre picked up and curiously examined. It was virgin gold.

An expression of discomfiture overcast the good

Father's face at this discovery ; but there was trace neither of malice nor satisfaction in the stranger's air, which was still of serious and fateful contemplation. When Father José recovered his equanimity, he said, bitterly—

‘ This, then, Sir Devil, is your work ! This is your deceitful lure for the weak souls of sinful nations ! So would you replace the Christian grace of Holy Spain ! ’

‘ This is what must be,’ returned the stranger gloomily. ‘ But listen, Sir Priest. It lies with you to avert the issue for a time. Leave me here in peace. Go back to Castile, and take with you your bells, your images, and your missions. Continue here, and you only precipitate results. Stay ! promise me you will do this, and you shall not lack that which will render your old age an ornament and a blessing ’ ; and the stranger motioned significantly to the lake.

It was here, the legend discreetly relates, that the Devil showed—as he always shows sooner or later—his cloven hoof. The worthy Padre, sorely perplexed by this threefold vision, and, if the truth must be told, a little nettled at this wresting away of the glory of holy Spanish discovery, had shown some hesitation. But the unlucky bribe of the Enemy of souls touched his Castilian spirit. Starting back in deep disgust, he brandished his crucifix in the face of the unmasked Fiend, and, in a voice that made the dusky vault resound, cried—

‘ Avaunt thee, Sathanas ! Diabolus, I defy thee ! What ! wouldst thou bribe me,—me, a brother of the Sacred Society of the Holy Jesus, Licentiate of Cordova and Inquisitor of Guadalaxara ? Thinkest thou to buy me with thy sordid treasure ? Avaunt ! ’

What might have been the issue of this rupture, and how complete might have been the triumph of the holy Father over the Arch-Fiend, who was recoiling aghast at these sacred titles and the flourishing symbol, we can never know, for at that moment the crucifix slipped through his fingers.

Scarcely had it touched the ground before Devil and

holy Father simultaneously cast themselves toward it. In the struggle they clinched, and the pious José, who was as much the superior of his antagonist in bodily as in spiritual strength, was about to treat the Great Adversary to a back somersault, when he suddenly felt the long nails of the stranger piercing his flesh. A new fear seized his heart, a numbing chillness crept through his body, and he struggled to free himself, but in vain. A strange roaring was in his ears; the lake and cavern danced before his eyes and vanished; and with a loud cry he sank senseless to the ground.

When he recovered his consciousness, he was aware of a gentle swaying motion of his body. He opened his eyes, and saw it was high noon, and that he was being carried in a litter through the valley. He felt stiff, and, looking down, perceived that his arm was tightly bandaged to his side.

He closed his eyes, and after a few words of thankful prayer, thought how miraculously he had been preserved, and made a vow of candlesticks to the blessed Saint José. He then called in a faint voice, and presently the penitent Ignacio stood beside him.

The joy the poor fellow felt at his patron's returning consciousness for some time choked his utterance. He could only ejaculate, 'A miracle! Blessed Saint José, he lives!' and kiss the Padre's bandaged hand. Father José, more intent on his last night's experience, waited for his emotion to subside, and asked where he had been found.

'On the mountain, your Reverence, but a few *varas* from where he attacked you.'

'How?—you saw him then?' asked the Padre, in unfeigned astonishment.

'Saw him, your Reverence! Mother of God, I should think I did! And your Reverence shall see him too, if he ever comes again within range of Ignacio's arquebuse.'

'What mean you, Ignacio?' said the Padre, sitting bolt-upright in his litter.

'Why, the bear, your Reverence,—the bear, holy

Father, who attacked your worshipful person while you were meditating on the top of yonder mountain.'

'Ah!' said the holy Father, lying down again. 'Chut, child! I would be at peace.'

When he reached the Mission he was tenderly cared for, and in a few weeks was enabled to resume those duties from which, as will be seen, not even the machinations of the Evil One could divert him. The news of his physical disaster spread over the country, and a letter to the Bishop of Guadalaxara contained a confidential and detailed account of the good Father's spiritual temptation. But in some way the story leaked out; and long after José was gathered to his fathers, his mysterious encounter formed the theme of thrilling and whispered narrative. The mountain was generally shunned. It is true that Señor Joaquín Pedrillo afterward located a grant near the base of the mountain; but as Señora Pedrillo was known to be a termagant half-breed, the Señor was not supposed to be over-fastidious.

Such is the Legend of Monte del Diablo. As I said before, it may seem to lack essential corroboration. The discrepancy between the Father's narrative and the actual climax has given rise to some scepticism on the part of ingenious quibblers. All such I would simply refer to that part of the report of Señor Julio Serro, Sub-Prefect of San Pablo, before whom attest of the above was made. Touching this matter, the worthy Prefect observes, 'That although the body of Father José doth show evidence of grievous conflict in the flesh, yet that is no proof that the Enemy of Souls, who could assume the figure of a decorous elderly *caballero*, could not at the same time transform himself into a bear for his own vile purposes.'

AMBROSE BIERCE

1842-1913 (?)

A HORSEMAN IN THE SKY

ONE sunny afternoon in the autumn of the year 1861, a soldier lay in a clump of laurel by the side of a road in Western Virginia. He lay at full length, upon his stomach, his feet resting upon the toes, his head upon the left forearm. His extended right hand loosely grasped his rifle. But for the somewhat methodical disposition of his limbs and a slight rhythmic movement of the cartridge box at the back of his belt, he might have been thought to be dead. He was asleep at his post of duty. But if detected he would be dead shortly afterward, that being the just and legal penalty of his crime.

The clump of laurel in which the criminal lay was in the angle of a road which, after ascending, southward, a steep acclivity to that point, turned sharply to the west, running along the summit for perhaps one hundred yards. There it turned southward again and went zig-zagging downward through the forest. At the salient of that second angle was a large flat rock, jutting out from the ridge to the northward, overlooking the deep valley from which the road ascended. The rock capped a high cliff; a stone dropped from its outer edge would have fallen sheer downward one thousand feet to the tops of the pines. The angle where the soldier lay was on another spur of the same cliff. Had he been awake he would have commanded a view, not only of the short arm of the road and the jutting rock but of the entire profile of the cliff below it. It might well have made him giddy to look.

The country was wooded everywhere except at the

bottom of the valley to the northward, where there was a small natural meadow, through which flowed a stream scarcely visible from the valley's rim. This open ground looked hardly larger than an ordinary doorway, but was really several acres in extent. Its green was more vivid than that of the enclosing forest. Away beyond it rose a line of giant cliffs similar to those upon which we are supposed to stand in our survey of the savage scene, and through which the road had somehow made its climb to the summit. The configuration of the valley, indeed, was such that from our point of observation it seemed entirely shut in, and one could not but have wondered how the road which found a way out of it had found a way into it, and whence came and whither went the waters of the stream that parted the meadow two thousand feet below.

No country is so wild and difficult but men will make it a theatre of war ; concealed in the forest at the bottom of that military rat-trap, in which half a hundred men in possession of the exits might have starved an army to submission, lay five regiments of Federal infantry. They had marched all the previous day and night and were resting. At nightfall they would take to the road again, climb to the place where their unfaithful sentinel now slept, and, descending the other slope of the ridge, fall upon a camp of the enemy at about midnight. Their hope was to surprise it, for the road led to the rear of it. In case of failure their position would be perilous in the extreme ; and fail they surely would should accident or vigilance apprise the enemy of the movement.

The sleeping sentinel in the clump of laurel was a young Virginian named Carter Druse. He was the son of wealthy parents, an only child, and had known such ease and cultivation and high living as wealth and taste were able to command in the mountain country of Western Virginia. His home was but a few miles from where he now lay. One morning he had risen from the breakfast table and said, quietly and gravely : ' Father, a Union regiment has arrived at Grafton. I am going to join it.'

The father lifted his leonine head, looked at the son a moment in silence, and replied : ' Go, Carter, and, whatever may occur, do what you conceive to be your duty. Virginia, to which you are a traitor, must get on without you. Should we both live to the end of the war, we will speak further of the matter. Your mother, as the physician has informed you, is in a most critical condition ; at the best she cannot be with us longer than a few weeks, but that time is precious. It would be better not to disturb her.'

So Carter Druse, bowing reverently to his father, who returned the salute with a stately courtesy which masked a breaking heart, left the home of his childhood to go soldiering. By conscience and courage, by deeds of devotion and daring, he soon commended himself to his fellows and his officers ; and it was to these qualities and to some knowledge of the country that he owed his selection for his present perilous duty at the extreme outpost. Nevertheless, fatigue had been stronger than resolution, and he had fallen asleep. What good or bad angel came in a dream to rouse him from his state of crime who shall say ? Without a movement, without a sound, in the profound silence and the languor of the late afternoon, some invisible messenger of fate touched with unsealing finger the eyes of his consciousness—whispered into the ear of his spirit the mysterious awakening word which no human lips have ever spoken, no human memory ever has recalled. He quietly raised his forehead from his arm and looked between the masking stems of the laurels, instinctively closing his right hand about the stock of his rifle.

His first feeling was a keen artistic delight. On a colossal pedestal, the cliff, motionless at the extreme edge of the capping rock and sharply outlined against the sky, was an equestrian statue of impressive dignity. The figure of the man sat the figure of the horse, straight and soldierly, but with the repose of a Grecian god carved in the marble which limits the suggestion of activity. The grey costume harmonized with its aerial background ; the metal of accoutrement and caparison was softened

and subdued by the shadow ; the animal's skin had no points of high light. A carbine, strikingly foreshortened, lay across the pommel of the saddle, kept in place by the right hand grasping it at the 'grip'; the left hand, holding the bridle rein, was invisible. In silhouette against the sky, the profile of the horse was cut with the sharpness of a cameo ; it looked across the heights of air to the confronting cliffs beyond. The face of the rider, turned slightly to the left, showed only an outline of temple and beard ; he was looking downward to the bottom of the valley. Magnified by its lift against the sky and by the soldier's testifying sense of the formidableness of a near enemy, the group appeared of heroic, almost colossal, size.

For an instant Druse had a strange, half-defined feeling that he had slept to the end of the war and was looking upon a noble work of art reared upon that commanding eminence to commemorate the deeds of an heroic past of which he had been an inglorious part. The feeling was dispelled by a slight movement of the group ; the horse, without moving its feet, had drawn its body slightly backward from the verge ; the man remained immobile as before. Broad awake and keenly alive to the significance of the situation, Druse now brought the butt of his rifle against his cheek by cautiously pushing the barrel forward through the bushes, cocked the piece, and, glancing through the sights, covered a vital spot of the horseman's breast. A touch upon the trigger and all would have been well with Carter Druse. At that instant the horseman turned his head and looked in the direction of his concealed foe—seemed to look into his very face, into his eyes, into his brave compassionate heart.

Is it, then, so terrible to kill an enemy in war—an enemy who has surprised a secret vital to the safety of one's self and comrades—an enemy more formidable for his knowledge than all his army for its numbers ? Carter Druse grew deathly pale ; he shook in every limb, turned faint, and saw the statuesque group before him as black figures, rising, falling, moving unsteadily in arcs of

circles in a fiery sky. His hand fell away from his weapon, his head slowly dropped until his face rested on the leaves in which he lay. This courageous gentleman and hardy soldier was near swooning from intensity of emotion.

It was not for long ; in another moment his face was raised from earth, his hands resumed their places on the rifle, his forefinger sought the trigger ; mind, heart, and eyes were clear, conscience and reason sound. He could not hope to capture that enemy ; to alarm him would but send him dashing to his camp with his fatal news. The duty of the soldier was plain : the man must be shot dead from ambush—without warning, without a moment's spiritual preparation, with never so much as an unspoken prayer, he must be sent to his account. But no—there is a hope ; he may have discovered nothing—perhaps he is but admiring the sublimity of the landscape. If permitted he may turn and ride carelessly away in the direction whence he came. Surely it will be possible to judge at the instant of his withdrawing whether he knows. It may well be that his fixity of attention—Druse turned his head and looked below, through the deeps of air downward, as from the surface to the bottom of a translucent sea. He saw creeping across the green meadow a sinuous line of figures of men and horses—some foolish commander was permitting the soldiers of his escort to water their beasts in the open, in plain view from a hundred summits !

Druse withdrew his eyes from the valley and fixed them again upon the group of man and horse in the sky, and again it was through the sights of his rifle. But this time his aim was at the horse. In his memory, as if they were a divine mandate, rang the words of his father at their parting. 'Whatever may occur, do what you conceive to be your duty.' He was calm now. His teeth were firmly but not rigidly closed ; his nerves were as tranquil as a sleeping babe's—not a tremour affected any muscle of his body ; his breathing until suspended in the act of taking aim, was regular and slow. Duty had conquered ; the spirit had said to the body : 'Peace, be still.' He fired.

At that moment an officer of the Federal force, who, in a spirit of adventure or in quest of knowledge, had left the hidden bivouac in the valley, and, with aimless feet, had made his way to the lower edge of a small open space near the foot of the cliff, was considering what he had to gain by pushing his exploration further. At a distance of a quarter-mile before him, but apparently at a stone's throw, rose from its fringe of pines the gigantic face of rock, towering to so great a height above him that it made him giddy to look up to where its edge cut a sharp, rugged line against the sky. At some distance away to his right it presented a clean, vertical profile against a background of blue sky to a point half of the way down, and of distant hills hardly less blue thence to the tops of the trees at its base. Lifting his eyes to the dizzy altitude of its summit, the officer saw an astonishing sight—a man on horseback riding down into the valley through the air!

Straight upright sat the rider, in military fashion, with a firm seat in the saddle, a strong clutch upon the rein to hold his charger from too impetuous a plunge. From his bare head his long hair streamed upward, waving like a plume. His right hand was concealed in the cloud of the horse's lifted mane. The animal's body was as level as if every hoof stroke encountered the resistant earth. Its motions were those of a wild gallop, but even as the officer looked they ceased, with all the legs thrown sharply forward as in the act of alighting from a leap. But this was a flight.

Filled with amazement and terror by this apparition of a horseman in the sky—half believing himself the chosen scribe of some new Apocalypse, the officer was overcome by the intensity of his emotions; his legs failed him and he fell. Almost at the same instant he heard a crashing sound in the trees—a sound that died without an echo, and all was still.

The officer rose to his feet, trembling. The familiar sensation of an abraded shin recalled his dazed faculties. Pulling himself together, he ran rapidly obliquely away from the cliff to a point a half-mile from its foot; thereabout he expected to find his man; and thereabout he

naturally failed. In the fleeting instant of his vision his imagination had been so wrought upon by the apparent grace and ease and intention of the marvellous performance that it did not occur to him that the line of march of aerial cavalry is directed downward, and that he could find the objects of his search at the very foot of the cliff. A half-hour later he returned to camp.

This officer was a wise man; he knew better than to tell an incredible truth. He said nothing of what he had seen. But when the commander asked him if in his scout he had learned anything of advantage to the expedition, he answered:

'Yes, sir; there is no road leading down into this valley from the southward.'

The commander, knowing better, smiled.

After firing his shot Private Carter Druse reloaded his rifle and resumed his watch. Ten minutes had hardly passed when a Federal sergeant crept cautiously to him on hands and knees. Druse neither turned his head nor looked at him, but lay without motion or sign of recognition.

'Did you fire?' the sergeant whispered.

'Yes.'

'At what?'

'A horse. It was standing on yonder rock—pretty far out. You see it is no longer there. It went over the cliff.'

The man's face was white, but he showed no other sign of emotion. Having answered, he turned away his face and said no more. The sergeant did not understand.

'See here, Druse,' he said, after a moment's silence, 'it's no use making a mystery. I order you to report. Was there anybody on the horse?'

'Yes.'

'Who?'

'My father.'

The sergeant rose to his feet and walked away. 'Good God!' he said.

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

1859—

THAT LITTLE SQUARE BOX

‘ALL aboard?’ said the captain.

‘All aboard, sir!’ said the mate.

‘Then stand by to let her go.’

It was nine o'clock on a Wednesday morning. The good ship *Spartan* was lying off Boston Quay with her cargo under hatches, her passengers shipped, and everything prepared for a start. The warning whistle had been sounded twice; the final bell had been rung. Her bowsprit was turned towards England, and the hiss of escaping steam showed that all was ready for her run of three thousand miles. She strained at the warps that held her like a greyhound at its leash.

I have the misfortune to be a very nervous man. A sedentary literary life has helped to increase the morbid love of solitude which, even in my boyhood, was one of my distinguishing characteristics. As I stood upon the quarter-deck of the Transatlantic steamer, I bitterly cursed the necessity which drove me back to the land of my forefathers. The shouts of the sailors, the rattle of the cordage, the farewells of my fellow-passengers, and the cheers of the mob, each and all jarred upon my sensitive nature. I felt sad too. An indescribable feeling, as of some impending calamity, seemed to haunt me. The sea was calm, and the breeze light. There was nothing to disturb the equanimity of the most confirmed of landmen, yet I felt as if I stood upon the verge of a great though indefinable danger. I have noticed that such presentiments occur often in men of my peculiar

temperament, and that they are not uncommonly fulfilled. There is a theory that it arises from a species of second-sight, a subtle spiritual communication with the future. I well remember that Herr Raumer, the eminent spiritualist, remarked on one occasion that I was the most sensitive subject as regards supernatural phenomena that he had ever encountered in the whole of his wide experience. Be that as it may, I certainly felt far from happy as I threaded my way among the weeping, cheering groups which dotted the white decks of the good ship *Spartan*. Had I known the experience which awaited me in the course of the next twelve hours I should even then at the last moment have sprung upon the shore, and made my escape from the accursed vessel.

'Time's up!' said the captain, closing his chronometer with a snap, and replacing it in his pocket. 'Time's up!' said the mate. There was a last wail from the whistle, a rush of friends and relatives upon the land. One warp was loosened, the gangway was being pushed away, when there was a shout from the bridge, and two men appeared, running rapidly down the quay. They were waving their hands and making frantic gestures, apparently with the intention of stopping the ship. 'Look sharp!' shouted the crowd. 'Hold hard!' cried the captain. 'Ease her! stop her! Up with the gangway!' and the two men sprang aboard just as the second warp parted, and a convulsive throb of the engine shot us clear of the shore. There was a cheer from the deck, another from the quay, a mighty fluttering of handkerchiefs, and the great vessel ploughed its way out of the harbour, and steamed grandly away across the placid bay.

We were fairly started upon our fortnight's voyage. There was a general dive among the passengers in quest of berths and luggage, while a popping of corks in the saloon proved that more than one bereaved traveller was adopting artificial means for drowning the pangs of separation. I glanced round the deck and took a running inventory of my *compagnons de voyage*. They presented the usual types met with upon these occasions.

There was no striking face among them. I speak as a connoisseur, for faces are a speciality of mine. I pounce upon a characteristic feature as a botanist does on a flower, and bear it away with me to analyse at my leisure, and classify and label it in my little anthropological museum. There was nothing worthy of me here. Twenty types of young America going to 'Yurrupe,' a few respectable middle-aged couples as an antidote, a sprinkling of clergymen and professional men, young ladies, bagmen, British exclusives, and all the *olla podrida* of an ocean-going steamer. I turned away from them and gazed back at the receding shores of America, and, as a cloud of remembrances rose before me, my heart warmed towards the land of my adoption. A pile of portmantaus and luggage chanced to be lying on one side of the deck, awaiting their turn to be taken below. With my usual love for solitude I walked behind these, and sitting on a coil of rope between them and the vessel's side, I indulged in a melancholy reverie.

I was aroused from this by a whisper behind me. 'Here's a quiet place,' said the voice. 'Sit down, and we can talk it over in safety.'

Glancing through a chink between two colossal chests, I saw that the passengers who had joined us at the last moment were standing at the other side of the pile. They had evidently failed to see me as I crouched in the shadow of the boxes. The one who had spoken was a tall and very thin man with a blue-black beard and a colourless face. His manner was nervous and excited. His companion was a short plethoric little fellow, with a brisk and resolute air. He had a cigar in his mouth, and a large ulster slung over his left arm. They both glanced round uneasily, as if to ascertain whether they were alone. 'This is just the place,' I heard the other say. They sat down on a bale of goods with their backs turned towards me, and I found myself, much against my will, playing the unpleasant part of eavesdropper to their conversation.

'Well, Muller,' said the taller of the two, 'we've got it aboard right enough.'

'Yes,' assented the man whom he had addressed as Muller, 'it's safe aboard.'

'It was rather a near go.'

'It was that, Flannigan.'

'It wouldn't have done to have missed the ship.'

'No, it would have put our plans out.'

'Ruined them entirely,' said the little man, and puffed furiously at his cigar for some minutes.

'I've got it here,' he said at last.

'Let me see it.'

'Is no one looking?'

'No, they're nearly all below.'

'We can't be too careful where so much is at stake,' said Muller, as he uncoiled the ulster which hung over his arm, and disclosed a dark object which he laid upon the deck. One glance at it was enough to cause me to spring to my feet with an exclamation of horror. Luckily they were so engrossed in the matter on hand that neither of them observed me. Had they turned their heads they would infallibly have seen my pale face glaring at them over the pile of boxes.

From the first moment of their conversation a horrible misgiving had come over me. It seemed more than confirmed as I gazed at what lay before me. It was a little square box made of some dark wood, and ribbed with brass. I suppose it was about the size of a cubic foot. It reminded me of a pistol-case, only it was decidedly higher. There was an appendage to it, however, on which my eyes were riveted, and which suggested the pistol itself rather than its receptacle. This was a trigger-like arrangement upon the lid, to which a coil of string was attached. Beside this trigger there was a small square aperture through the wood. The tall man, Flannigan, as his companion called him, applied his eye to this, and peered in for several minutes with an expression of intense anxiety upon his face.

'It seems right enough,' he said at last.

'I tried not to shake it,' said his companion.

'Such delicate things need delicate treatment. Put in some of the needful, Muller.'

The shorter man fumbled in his pocket for some time and then produced a small paper packet. He opened this, and took out of it half a handful of whitish granules, which he poured down through the hole. A curious clicking noise followed from the inside of the box, and both men smiled in a satisfied way.

'Nothing much wrong there,' said Flannigan.

'Right as a trivet,' answered his companion.

'Look out! here's someone coming. Take it down to our berth. It wouldn't do to have anyone suspecting what our game is, or, worse still, have them fumbling with it, and letting it off by mistake.'

'Well, it would come to the same, whoever let it off,' said Muller.

'They'd be rather astonished if they pulled the trigger,' said the taller, with a sinister laugh. 'Ha, ha! fancy their faces! It's not a bad bit of workmanship, I flatter myself.'

'No,' said Muller. 'I hear it is your own design, every bit of it, isn't it?'

'Yes, the spring and the sliding shutter are my own.'

'We should take out a patent.'

And the two men laughed again with a cold harsh laugh, as they took up the little brass-bound package, and concealed it in Muller's voluminous overcoat.

'Come down, and we'll stow it in our berth,' said Flannigan. 'We won't need it until to-night, and it will be safe there.'

His companion assented, and the two went arm-in-arm along the deck and disappeared down the hatchway, bearing the mysterious little box away with them. The last words I heard were a muttered injunction from Flannigan to carry it carefully, and avoid knocking it against the bulwarks.

How long I remained sitting on that coil of rope I shall never know. The horror of the conversation I had just overheard was aggravated by the first sinking qualms of sea-sickness. The long roll of the Atlantic was beginning to assert itself over both ship and passengers. I felt prostrated in mind and in body, and fell into a

state of collapse, from which I was finally aroused by the hearty voice of our worthy quartermaster.

'Do you mind moving out of that, sir?' he said. 'We want to get this lumber cleared off the deck.'

His bluff manner and ruddy healthy face seemed to be a positive insult to me in my present condition. Had I been a courageous or a muscular man I could have struck him. As it was, I treated the honest sailor to a melodramatic scowl which seemed to cause him no small astonishment, and strode past him to the other side of the deck. Solitude was what I wanted—solitude in which I could brood over the frightful crime which was being hatched before my very eyes. One of the quarter-boats was hanging rather low down upon the davits. An idea struck me, and climbing on the bulwarks, I stepped into the empty boat and lay down in the bottom of it. Stretched on my back, with nothing but the blue sky above me, and an occasional view of the mizzen as the vessel rolled, I was at least alone with my sickness and my thoughts.

I tried to recall the words which had been spoken in the terrible dialogue I had overheard. Would they admit of any construction but the one which stared me in the face? My reason forced me to confess that they would not. I endeavoured to array the various facts which formed the chain of circumstantial evidence, and to find a flaw in it; but no, not a link was missing. There was the strange way in which our passengers had come aboard, enabling them to evade any examination of their luggage. The very name of 'Flannigan' smacked of Fenianism, while 'Muller' suggested nothing but socialism and murder. Then their mysterious manner; their remark that their plans would have been ruined had they missed the ship; their fear of being observed; last, but not least, the clenching evidence in the production of the little square box with the trigger, and their grim joke about the face of the man who should let it off by mistake—could these facts lead to any conclusion other than that they were the desperate emissaries of somebody, political or otherwise, who intended

to sacrifice themselves, their fellow-passengers, and the ship, in one great holocaust? The whitish granules which I had seen one of them pour into the box formed no doubt a fuse or train for exploding it. I had myself heard a sound come from it which might have emanated from some delicate piece of machinery. But what did they mean by their allusion to to-night? Could it be that they contemplated putting their horrible design into execution on the very first evening of our voyage? The mere thought of it sent a cold shudder over me, and made me for a moment superior even to the agonies of sea-sickness.

I have remarked that I am a physical coward. I am a moral one also. It is seldom that the two defects are united to such a degree in the one character. I have known many men who were most sensitive to bodily danger, and yet were distinguished for the independence and strength of their minds. In my own case, however, I regret to say that my quiet and retiring habits had fostered a nervous dread of doing anything remarkable or making myself conspicuous, which exceeded, if possible, my fear of personal peril. An ordinary mortal placed under the circumstances in which I now found myself would have gone at once to the Captain, confessed his fears, and put the matter into his hands. To me, however, constituted as I am, the idea was most repugnant. The thought of becoming the observed of all observers, cross-questioned by a stranger, and confronted with two desperate conspirators in the character of a denouncer, was hateful to me. Might it not by some remote possibility prove that I was mistaken? What would be my feelings if there should turn out to be no grounds for my accusation? No, I would procrastinate; I would keep my eye on the two desperadoes and dog them at every turn. Anything was better than the possibility of being wrong.

Then it struck me that even at that moment some new phase of the conspiracy might be developing itself. The nervous excitement seemed to have driven away my incipient attack of sickness, for I was able to stand up

and lower myself from the boat without experiencing any return of it. I staggered along the deck with the intention of descending into the cabin and finding how my acquaintances of the morning were occupying themselves. Just as I had my hand on the companion rail, I was astonished by receiving a hearty slap on the back, which nearly shot me down the steps with more haste than dignity.

'Is that you, Hammond?' said a voice which I seemed to recognise.

'God bless me,' I said, as I turned round, 'it can't be Dick Merton! Why, how are you, old man?'

This was an unexpected piece of luck in the midst of my perplexities. Dick was just the man I wanted; kindly and shrewd in his nature, and prompt in his actions, I should have no difficulty in telling him my suspicions, and could rely upon his sound sense to point out the best course to pursue. Since I was a little lad in the second form at Harrow, Dick had been my adviser and protector. He saw at a glance that something had gone wrong with me.

'Hullo!' he said, in his kindly way, 'what's put you about, Hammond? You look as white as a sheet. *Mal de mer*, eh?'

'No, not that altogether,' said I. 'Walk up and down with me, Dick; I want to speak to you. Give me your arm.'

Supporting myself on Dick's stalwart frame, I tottered along by his side; but it was some time before I could muster resolution to speak.

'Have a cigar?' said he, breaking the silence.

'No, thanks,' said I. 'Dick, we shall be all corpses to-night.'

'That's no reason against your having a cigar now,' said Dick, in his cool way, but looking hard at me from under his shaggy eyebrows as he spoke. He evidently thought that my intellect was a little gone.

'No,' I continued, 'it's no laughing matter; and I speak in sober earnest, I assure you. I have discovered an infamous conspiracy, Dick, to destroy this ship and

every soul that is in her'; and I then proceeded systematically, and in order, to lay before him the chain of evidence which I had collected. 'There, Dick,' I said, as I concluded, 'what do you think of that and, above all, what am I to do?'

To my astonishment he burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

'I'd be frightened,' he said, 'if any fellow but you had told me as much. You always had a way, Hammond, of discovering mares' nests. I like to see the old traits breaking out again. Do you remember at school how you swore there was a ghost in the long room, and how it turned out to be your own reflection in the mirror? Why, man,' he continued, 'what object would anyone have in destroying this ship? We have no great political guns aboard. On the contrary, the majority of the passengers are Americans. Besides, in this sober nineteenth century, the most wholesale murderers stop at including themselves among their victims. Depend upon it, you have misunderstood them, and have mistaken a photographic camera, or something equally innocent, for an infernal machine.'

'Nothing of the sort, sir,' said I, rather touchily. 'You will learn to your cost, I fear, that I have neither exaggerated nor misinterpreted a word. As to the box, I have certainly never before seen one like it. It contained delicate machinery; of that I am convinced, from the way in which the men handled it and spoke of it.'

'You'd make out every packet of perishable goods to be a torpedo,' said Dick, 'if that is to be your only test.'

'The man's name was Flannigan,' I continued.

'I don't think that would go very far in a court of law,' said Dick; 'but come, I have finished my cigar. Suppose we go down together and split a bottle of claret. You can point out these two Orsinis to me if they are still in the cabin.'

'All right,' I answered; 'I am determined not to lose sight of them all day. Don't look hard at them, though, for I don't want them to think that they are being watched.'

'Trust me,' said Dick; 'I'll look as unconscious and guileless as a lamb'; and with that we passed down the companion and into the saloon.

A good many passengers were scattered about the great central table, some wrestling with refractory carpet-bags and rug-straps, some having their luncheon, and a few reading and otherwise amusing themselves. The objects of our quest were not there. We passed down the room and peered into every berth, but there was no sign of them. 'Heavens!' thought I, 'perhaps at this very moment they are beneath our feet, in the hold or engine-room, preparing their diabolical contrivance!' It was better to know the worst than to remain in such suspense.

'Steward,' said Dick, 'are there any other gentlemen about?'

'There's two in the smoking-room, sir,' answered the steward.

The smoking-room was a little snugger, luxuriously fitted up, and adjoining the pantry. We pushed the door open and entered. A sigh of relief escaped from my bosom. The very first object on which my eye rested was the cadaverous face of Flannigan, with its hard-set mouth and unwinking eye. His companion sat opposite to him. They were both drinking, and a pile of cards lay upon the table. They were engaged in playing as we entered. I nudged Dick to show him that we had found our quarry, and we sat down beside them with as unconcerned an air as possible. The two conspirators seemed to take little notice of our presence. I watched them both narrowly. The game at which they were playing was 'Napoleon.' Both were adepts at it, and I could not help admiring the consummate nerve of men who, with such a secret at their hearts, could devote their minds to the manipulation of a long suit or the finessing of a queen. Money changed hands rapidly; but the run of luck seemed to be all against the taller of the two players. At last he threw down his cards on the table with an oath, and refused to go on.

'No, I'm hanged if I do,' he said; 'I haven't had more than two of a suit for five hands.'

'Never mind,' said his comrade, as he gathered up his winnings ; ' a few dollars one way or the other won't go very far after to-night's work.'

I was astonished at the rascal's audacity, but took care to keep my eyes fixed abstractedly upon the ceiling, and drank my wine in as unconscious a manner as possible. I felt that Flannigan was looking towards me with his wolfish eyes to see if I had noticed the allusion. He whispered something to his companion which I failed to catch. It was a caution, I suppose, for the other answered rather angrily—

'Nonsense! Why shouldn't I say what I like? Over-caution is just what would ruin us.'

'I believe you want it not to come off,' said Flannigan.

'You believe nothing of the sort,' said the other, speaking rapidly and loudly. 'You know as well as I do that when I play for a stake I like to win it. But I won't have my words criticised and cut short by you or any other man. I have as much interest in our success as you have—more, I hope.'

He was quite hot about it, and puffed furiously at his cigar for some minutes. The eyes of the other ruffian wandered alternately from Dick Merton to myself. I knew that I was in the presence of a desperate man, that a quiver of my lip might be the signal for him to plunge a weapon into my heart, but I betrayed more self-command than I should have given myself credit for under such trying circumstances. As to Dick, he was as immovable and apparently as unconscious as the Egyptian Sphinx.

There was silence for some time in the smoking-room, broken only by the crisp rattle of the cards, as the man Muller shuffled them up before replacing them in his pocket. He still seemed to be somewhat flushed and irritable. Throwing the end of his cigar into the spittoon, he glanced defiantly at his companion and turned towards me.

'Can you tell me, sir,' he said, 'when this ship will be heard of again?'

They were both looking at me ; but though my face

may have turned a trifle paler, my voice was as steady as ever as I answered—

‘I presume, sir, that it will be heard of first when it enters Queenstown Harbour.’

‘Ha, ha!’ laughed the angry little man, ‘I knew you would say that. Don’t you kick me under the table, Flannigan, I won’t stand it. I know what I am doing. You are wrong, sir,’ he continued, turning to me, ‘utterly wrong.’

‘Some passing ship, perhaps,’ suggested Dick.

‘No, nor that either.’

‘The weather is fine,’ I said; ‘why should we not be heard of at our destination?’

‘I didn’t say we shouldn’t be heard of at our destination. Possibly we may not, and in any case that is not where we shall be heard of first.’

‘Where, then?’ asked Dick.

‘That you shall never know. Suffice it that a rapid and mysterious agency will signal our whereabouts, and that before the day is out. Ha, ha!’ and he chuckled once again.

‘Come on deck!’ growled his comrade; ‘you have drunk too much of that confounded brandy-and-water. It has loosened your tongue. Come away!’ and taking him by the arm he half led him, half forced him out of the smoking-room and we heard them stumbling up the companion together, and on to the deck.

‘Well, what do you think now?’ I gasped, as I turned towards Dick. He was as imperturbable as ever.

‘Think!’ he said; ‘why, I think what his companion thinks, that we have been listening to the ravings of a half-drunken man. The fellow stunk of brandy.’

‘Nonsense, Dick! you saw how the other tried to stop his tongue.’

‘Of course he did. He didn’t want his friend to make a fool of himself before strangers. Maybe the short one is a lunatic, and the other his private keeper. It’s quite possible.’

‘O, Dick, Dick,’ I cried, ‘how can you be so blind! Don’t you see that every word confirmed our previous suspicion?’

'Humbug, man!' said Dick; 'you're working yourself into a state of nervous excitement. Why, what the devil do *you* make of all that nonsense about a mysterious agent which would signal our whereabouts?'

'I'll tell you what he meant, Dick,' I said, bending forward and grasping my friend's arm. 'He meant a sudden glare and a flash seen far out at sea by some lonely fisherman off the American coast. That's what he meant.'

'I didn't think you were such a fool, Hammond,' said Dick Merton testily. 'If you try to fix a literal meaning on the twaddle that every drunken man talks, you will come to some queer conclusions. Let us follow their example, and go on deck. You need fresh air, I think. Depend upon it, your liver is out of order. A sea-voyage will do you a world of good.'

'If ever I see the end of this one,' I groaned, 'I'll promise never to venture on another. They are laying the cloth, so it's hardly worth while my going up. I'll stay below and unpack my things.'

'I hope dinner will find you in a more pleasant state of mind,' said Dick; and he went out, leaving me to my thoughts until the clang of the great gong summoned us to the saloon.

My appetite, I need hardly say, had not been improved by the incidents which had occurred during the day. I sat down, however, mechanically at the table, and listened to the talk which was going on around me. There were nearly a hundred first-class passengers, and as the wine began to circulate, their voices combined with the clash of the dishes to form a perfect Babel. I found myself seated between a very stout and nervous old lady and a prim little clergyman; and as neither made any advances I retired into my shell, and spent my time in observing the appearance of my fellow-voyagers. I could see Dick in the dim distance dividing his attentions between a jointless fowl in front of him and a self-possessed young lady at his side. Captain Dowie was doing the honours at my end, while the surgeon of the vessel was seated at the other. I was glad to notice

that Flannigan was placed almost opposite to me. As long as I had him before my eyes I knew that, for the time at least, we were safe. He was sitting with what was meant to be a sociable smile on his grim face. It did not escape me that he drank largely of wine—so largely that even before the dessert appeared his voice had become decidedly husky. His friend Muller was seated a few places lower down. He ate little, and appeared to be nervous and restless.

‘Now, ladies,’ said our genial Captain, ‘I trust that you will consider yourselves at home aboard my vessel. I have no fears for the gentlemen. A bottle of champagne, steward. Here’s to a fresh breeze and a quick passage! I trust our friends in America will hear of our safe arrival in eight days, or in nine at the very latest.’

I looked up. Quick as was the glance which passed between Flannigan and his confederate, I was able to intercept it. There was an evil smile upon the former’s thin lips.

The conversation rippled on. Politics, the sea, amusements, religion, each was in turn discussed. I remained a silent though an interested listener. It struck me that no harm could be done by introducing the subject which was ever in my mind. It could be managed in an off-hand way, and would at least have the effect of turning the Captain’s thoughts in that direction. I could watch, too, what effect it would have upon the faces of the conspirators.

There was a sudden lull in the conversation. The ordinary subjects of interest appeared to be exhausted. The opportunity was a favourable one.

‘May I ask, Captain,’ I said, bending forward and speaking very distinctly, ‘what you think of Fenian manifestos?’

The Captain’s ruddy face became a shade darker from honest indignation.

‘They are poor cowardly things,’ he said, ‘as silly as they are wicked.’

‘The impotent threats of a set of anonymous scoundrels,’ said a pompous-looking old gentleman beside him.

'O Captain!' said the fat lady at my side, 'you don't really think they would blow up a ship?'

'I have no doubt they would if they could. But I am very sure they shall never blow up mine.'

'May I ask what precautions are taken against them?' asked an elderly man at the end of the table.

'All goods sent aboard the ship are strictly examined,' said Captain Dowie.

'But suppose a man brought explosives aboard with him?' I suggested.

'They are too cowardly to risk their own lives in that way.'

During this conversation Flannigan had not betrayed the slightest interest in what was going on. He raised his head now and looked at the Captain.

'Don't you think you are rather underrating them?' he said. 'Every secret society has produced desperate men—why shouldn't the Fenians have them too? Many men think it a privilege to die in the service of a cause which seems right in their eyes, though others may think it wrong.'

'Indiscriminate murder cannot be right in anybody's eyes,' said the little clergyman.

'The bombardment of Paris was nothing else,' said Flannigan; 'yet the whole civilised world agreed to look on with folded arms, and change the ugly word "murder" into the more euphonious one of "war." It seemed right enough to German eyes; why shouldn't dynamite seem so to the Fenian?'

'At any rate their empty vapourings have led to nothing as yet,' said the Captain.

'Excuse me,' returned Flannigan, 'but is there not some room for doubt yet as to the fate of the *Dotterel*? I have met men in America who asserted from their own personal knowledge that there was a coal torpedo aboard that vessel.'

Then they lied,' said the Captain. 'It was proved conclusively at the court-martial to have arisen from an explosion of coal-gas—but we had better change the subject, or we may cause the ladies to have a restless

night'; and the conversation once more drifted back into its original channel.

During this little discussion Flannigan had argued his point with a gentlemanly deference and a quiet power for which I had not given him credit. I could not help admiring a man who, on the eve of a desperate enterprise, could courteously argue upon a point which must touch him so nearly. He had, as I have already mentioned, partaken of a considerable quantity of wine; but though there was a slight flush upon his pale cheek, his manner was as reserved as ever. He did not join in the conversation again, but seemed to be lost in thought.

A whirl of conflicting ideas was battling in my own mind. What was I to do? Should I stand up now and denounce them before both passengers and Captain? Should I demand a few minutes' conversation with the latter in his own cabin, and reveal it all? For an instant I was half resolved to do it, but then the old constitutional timidity came back with redoubled force. After all there might be some mistake. Dick had heard the evidence and had refused to believe in it. I determined to let things go on their course. A strange reckless feeling came over me. Why should I help men who were blind to their own danger? Surely it was the duty of the officers to protect us, not ours to give warning to them. I drank off a couple of glasses of wine, and staggered up on deck with the determination of keeping my secret locked in my own bosom.

It was a glorious evening. Even in my excited state of mind I could not help leaning against the bulwarks and enjoying the refreshing breeze. Away to the westward a solitary sail stood out as a dark speck against the great sheet of flame left by the setting sun. I shuddered as I looked at it. It was grand but appalling. A single star was twinkling faintly above our mainmast, but a thousand seemed to gleam in the water below with every stroke of our propeller. The only blot on the fair scene was the great trail of smoke which stretched away behind us like a black slash upon a crimson curtain. It was hard

to believe that the great peace which hung over all Nature could be marred by a poor miserable mortal.

'After all,' I thought, as I gazed into the blue depths beneath me, 'if the worst comes to the worst, it is better to die here than to linger in agony upon a sick-bed on land.' A man's life seems a very paltry thing amid the great forces of Nature. All my philosophy could not prevent my shuddering, however, when I turned my head and saw two shadowy figures at the other side of the deck, which I had no difficulty in recognising. They seemed to be conversing earnestly, but I had no opportunity of overhearing what was said; so I contented myself with pacing up and down, and keeping a vigilant watch upon their movements.

It was a relief to me when Dick came on deck. Even an incredulous confidant is better than none at all.

'Well, old man,' he said, giving me a facetious dig in the ribs, 'we've not been blown up yet.'

'No, not yet,' said I; 'but that's no proof that we are not going to be.'

'Nonsense, man!' said Dick; 'I can't conceive what has put this extraordinary idea into your head. I have been talking to one of your supposed assassins, and he seems a pleasant fellow enough; quite a sporting character, I should think, from the way he speaks.'

'Dick,' I said, 'I am as certain that those men have an infernal machine, and that we are on the verge of eternity, as if I saw them putting the match to the fuse.'

'Well, if you really think so,' said Dick, half awed for the moment by the earnestness of my manner, 'it is your duty to let the Captain know of your suspicions.'

'You are right,' I said; 'I will. My absurd timidity has prevented my doing so sooner. I believe our lives can only be saved by laying the whole matter before him.'

'Well, go and do it now,' said Dick; 'but for goodness' sake don't mix me up in the matter.'

'I'll speak to him when he comes off the bridge,' I answered; 'and in the meantime I don't mean to lose sight of them.'

'Let me know the result,' said my companion; and

with a nod he strolled away in search, I fancy, of his partner at the dinner-table.

Left to myself, I bethought me of my retreat of the morning, and climbing on the bulwark I mounted into the quarter-boat, and lay down there. In it I could reconsider my course of action, and by raising my head I was able at any time to get a view of my disagreeable neighbours.

An hour passed, and the Captain was still on the bridge. He was talking to one of the passengers, a retired naval officer, and the two were deep in debate concerning some abstruse point in navigation. I could see the red tips of their cigars from where I lay. It was dark now, so dark that I could hardly make out the figures of Flannigan and his accomplice. They were still standing in the position which they had taken up after dinner. A few of the passengers were scattered about the deck, but many had gone below. A strange stillness seemed to pervade the air. The voices of the watch and the rattle of the wheel were the only sounds which broke the silence.

Another half-hour passed. The Captain was still upon the bridge. It seemed as if he would never come down. My nerves were in a state of unnatural tension, so much so that the sound of two steps upon the deck made me start up in a quiver of excitement. I peered over the edge of the boat, and saw that our suspicious passengers had crossed from the other side, and were standing almost directly beneath me. The light of a binnacle fell full upon the ghastly face of the ruffian Flannigan. Even in that short glance I saw that Muller had the ulster, whose use I knew so well, slung loosely over his arm. I sank back with a groan. It seemed that my fatal procrastination had sacrificed two hundred innocent lives.

I had read of the fiendish vengeance which awaited a spy. I knew that men with their lives in their hands would stick at nothing. All I could do was to cower at the bottom of the boat and listen silently to their whispered talk below.

'This place will do,' said a voice.

'Yes, the leeward side is best.'

'I wonder if the trigger will act?'

'I am sure it will.'

'We were to let it off at ten, were we not?'

'Yes, at ten sharp. We have eight minutes yet.'

There was a pause. Then the voice began again—

'They'll hear the drop of the trigger, won't they?'

'It doesn't matter. It will be too late for anyone to prevent its going off.'

'That's true. There will be some excitement among those we have left behind, won't there?'

'Rather. How long do you reckon it will be before they hear of us?'

'The first news will get in at about midnight at earliest.'

'That will be my doing.'

'No, mine.'

'Ha, ha! we'll settle that.'

There was a pause here. Then I heard Muller's voice in a ghastly whisper, 'There's only five minutes more.'

How slowly the moments seemed to pass! I could count them by the throbbing of my heart.

'It'll make a sensation on land,' said a voice.

'Yes, it will make a noise in the newspapers.'

I raised my head and peered over the side of the boat. There seemed no hope, no help. Death stared me in the face, whether I did or did not give the alarm. The Captain had at last left the bridge. The deck was deserted, save for those two dark figures crouching in the shadow of the boat.

Flannigan had a watch lying open in his hand.

'Three minutes more,' he said. 'Put it down upon the deck.'

'No, put it here on the bulwarks.'

It was the little square box. I knew by the sound that they had placed it near the davit, and almost exactly under my head.

I looked over again. Flannigan was pouring something out of a paper into his hand. It was white and

granular—the same that I had seen him use in the morning. It was meant as a fuse, no doubt, for he shovelled it into the little box, and I heard the strange noise which had previously arrested my attention.

‘A minute and a half more,’ he said. ‘Shall you or I pull the string?’

‘I will pull it,’ said Muller.

He was kneeling down and holding the end in his hand. Flannigan stood behind with his arms folded, and an air of grim resolution upon his face.

I could stand it no longer. My nervous system seemed to give way in a moment.

‘Stop!’ I screamed, springing to my feet. ‘Stop, misguided and unprincipled men!’

They both staggered backwards. I fancy they thought I was a spirit, with the moonlight streaming down upon my pale face.

I was brave enough now. I had gone too far to retreat.

‘Cain was damned,’ I cried, ‘and he slew but one; would you have the blood of two hundred upon your souls?’

‘He’s mad!’ said Flannigan. ‘Time’s up. Let it off, Muller.’

I sprang down upon the deck.

‘You shan’t do it!’ I said.

‘By what right do you prevent us?’

‘By every right, human and divine.’

‘It’s no business of yours. Clear out of this.’

‘Never!’ said I.

‘Confound the fellow! There’s too much at stake to stand on ceremony. I’ll hold him, Muller, while you pull the trigger.’

Next moment I was struggling in the herculean grasp of the Irishman. Resistance was useless; I was a child in his hands.

He pinned me up against the side of the vessel, and held me there.

‘Now,’ he said, ‘look sharp. He can’t prevent us.’

I felt that I was standing on the verge of eternity.

Half-strangled in the arms of the taller ruffian, I saw the other approach the fatal box. He stooped over it and seized the string. I breathed one prayer when I saw his grasp tighten upon it. Then came a sharp snap, a strange rasping noise. The trigger had fallen, the side of the box flew out, and let off—*two grey carrier pigeons!*

Little more need be said. It is not a subject on which I care to dwell. The whole thing is too utterly disgusting and absurd. Perhaps the best thing I can do is to retire gracefully from the scene, and let the sporting correspondent of the *New York Herald* fill my unworthy place. Here is an extract clipped from its columns shortly after our departure from America :

'Pigeon-flying Extraordinary.—A novel match has been brought off last week between the birds of John H. Flannigan, of Boston, and Jeremiah Muller, a well-known citizen of Lowell. Both men have devoted much time and attention to an improved breed of bird, and the challenge is an old-standing one. The pigeons were backed to a large amount, and there was considerable local interest in the result. The start was from the deck of the Transatlantic steamship *Spartan*, at ten o'clock on the evening of the day of starting, the vessel being then reckoned to be about a hundred miles from the land. The bird which reached home first was to be declared the winner. Considerable caution had, we believe, to be observed, as some captains have a prejudice against the bringing off of sporting events aboard their vessels. In spite of some little difficulty at the last moment, the trap was sprung almost exactly at ten o'clock. Muller's bird arrived in Lowell in an extreme state of exhaustion on the following morning, while Flannigan's has not been heard of. The backers of the latter have the satisfaction of knowing, however, that the whole affair has been characterised by extreme fairness. The pigeons were confined in a specially invented trap, which could only be opened by the spring. It was thus possible to feed them through an aperture in the top, but any tampering with their wings was quite out of the question. A few

such matches would go far towards popularising pigeon-flying in America, and form an agreeable variety to the morbid exhibitions of human endurance which have assumed such proportions during the last few years.'

From *Tales of Pirates and Blue Water* (by kind permission of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Mr. John Murray).

G. K. CHESTERTON

1874-

THE TOWER OF TREASON

AT a certain moment, just before sunset, a young man was walking in a rather extraordinary fashion across a wild country bearded with grey and wintry forests. In the solitude of that silent and wooded wilderness he was walking backwards. There was nobody to notice the eccentricity ; it could not arrest the rush of the eagles over those endless forests where Hungarian frontiers fade into the Balkans ; it could not be expected to arouse criticism in the squirrel or the hare. Even the peasants of those parts might possibly have been content to explain it as the vow of a pilgrim, or some other wild religious exercise ; for it was a land of wild religious exercises. Only a little way in front of him (or rather, at that instant behind him), the goal of his journey and many previous journeys, was a strange half-military monastery, like some old chapel of the Templars, where vigilant ascetics watched night and day over a hoard of sacred jewels, guarded at once like the crown of a king and the relic of a saint. Barely a league beyond, where the hills began to lift themselves clear of the forest, was a yet more solitary outpost of such devotional seclusion ; a hermitage which held captive a man once famous through half Europe, a dazzling diplomatist and ambitious statesman, now solitary and only rarely visited by the religious, for whom he was supposed to have more invisible jewels of a new wisdom. All that land, that seemed so silent and empty, was alive with such miracles.

Nevertheless the young man was not performing a

religious vow, or going on a religious pilgrimage. He had himself known personally the renowned recluse of the hermitage on the hill, when they were both equally in the world and worldly; but he had not the faintest intention of following his holy example. He was himself a guest at the monastery that was the consecrated casket of the strange jewels; but his errand was purely political and not in the least consecrated. He was a diplomatist by profession; but it must not be lightly inferred that he was walking backwards out of excessive deference to the etiquette of courts. He was an Englishman by nationality; but he was not, with somewhat distant reverence, still walking backwards before the King of England. Nor was he paying so polite a duty to any other king, though he might himself have said that he was paying it to a queen. In short the explanation of his antic, as of not a few antics, was that he was in love; a condition common in romances and not unknown in real life. He was looking backwards at the house he had just left, in an abstracted or distracted fashion, half hoping to see a last signal from it or merely to catch a last glimpse of it among the trees. And his look was the more longing and lingering on this particular evening, for an atmospheric reason he would have found it hard to explain; a sense of pathos and distance and division hardly explained by his practical difficulties. As the sunset clouds were heavy with a purple which typifies the rich tragedy of Lent, so on this evening passion seemed to weigh on him with something of the power of doom. And a pagan of the mystical sort would certainly have called what happened next an omen; though a practical man of the modern sort might rather have hinted that it was the highly calculable effect of walking backwards and being a fool. A noise of distant firing was heard in the forest; and the slight start he gave, combined with a loop of grass that caught his foot, threw him sprawling all his length; as if that distant shot had brought him down.

But the omens were not all ended; nor could they all be counted pagan. For as he gazed upwards for an instant, from the place where he had fallen, he saw above

the black forest and against the vivid violet clouds, something strangely suitable to that tragic purple recalling the traditions of Lent. It was a great face between outstretched gigantic arms; the face upon a large wooden crucifix. The figure was carved in the round but very much in the rough, in a rude archaic style, and was probably an old outpost of Latin Christianity in that labyrinth of religious frontiers. He must have seen it before, for it stood on a little hill in a clearing of the woods, just opposite the one straight path leading to the sanctuary of the jewels, the tower of which could already be seen rising out of the sea of leaves. But somehow the size of the head above the trees, seen suddenly from below after the shock of the fall, had the look of a judgment in the sky. It seemed a strange fate to have fallen at the foot of it.

The young man, whose name was Bertram Drake, came from Cambridge and was heir to all the comforts and conventions of scepticism, further enlivened by a certain impatience in his own intellectual temper, which made him more mutinous than was good for his professional career; an active, restless man with a dark but open and audacious face. But for an instant something had stirred in him which is Christendom buried in Europe; something which is a memory even where it is a myth. Rising, he turned a troubled gaze to the great circle of dark grey forests, out of which rose in the distance the lonely tower of his destination; and even as he did so he saw something else. A few feet from where he had just fallen, and risen again to his feet, lay another fallen figure. And the figure did not rise.

He strode across, bent down over the body and touched it, and was soon grimly satisfied about why it was lying still. Nor was it without a further shock; for he even realised that he had seen the man before, though in a sufficiently casual and commonplace fashion; as a rustic bringing timber to the house he had just left. He recognised the spectacles on the square and stolid face; they were horn spectacles of the plainest pattern, yet they did not somehow suit his figure, which was

clothed loosely like an ordinary peasant. And in the tragedy of the moment they were almost grotesque. The very fixity of the spectacles on the face was one of those details of daily habit that suddenly made death incredible. He had looked down at him for several seconds, before he became conscious that the deathly silence around was in truth a living silence ; he was not alone.

A yard or two away an armed man was standing like a statue. He was a stalwart but rather stooping figure, with a long antiquated musket slung aslant on his shoulders ; and in his hand a drawn sabre shone like a silver crescent. For the rest, he was a long-coated, long-bearded figure with a faint suggestion, to be felt in some figures from Russia and Eastern Europe generally, that the coats were like skirts and that the big beard had some of the terrors of a hairy mask ; a faint touch of the true East. Thus accoutred, it had the look of a rude uniform ; but the Englishman knew it was not that of the small Slav state in which he stood ; which may be called, for the purpose of this tale, the kingdom of Transylvania. But when Drake addressed him in the language of that country, with which he himself was already fairly familiar, it was clear enough that the stranger understood. And there was a final touch of something strange in the fact that the brown eyes of this bearded barbaric figure seemed not only sad but even soft, as with a sort of mystification of their own.

‘Have you murdered this man ?’ asked the Englishman sternly.

The other shook his head ; and then answered an incredulous stare by the simple but sufficient gesture of holding out his bare sabre immediately under the inquirer’s eyes. It was an unanswerable fact that the blade was quite clean and without a spot of blood.

‘But you were going to murder him,’ said Drake. ‘Why did you draw your sword ?’

‘I was going to——’ and with that the stranger stopped in his speech, hesitated, and then suddenly slapping his sabre back into the sheath, dived into the

bushes and disappeared, before Drake could make a movement in pursuit of him.

The echoes of the original volley that had waked the woods had not long died away on the distant heights beyond the tower ; and Drake could now only suppose that the shot thus fired had been the real cause of death. He was convinced, for many causes, that the shot had come from the tower ; and he had other reasons for rapidly repairing thither besides the necessity of giving the fatal news to the nearest human habitation. He hurried along the very straight and strictly embanked road that was like a bridge between the tower and the little hill in front of the crucifix ; and soon came under the shadow of the strange monastic building, now enormous in scale though still simple in outline. For though it was as wide in its circle as a great camp, and even bore on its flat top a sort of roof garden large enough to allow a little exercise to its permanent guards and captives, it rose sheer from the ground in a single round and windowless wall ; so high that it stood up in the landscape almost like a pillar rather than a tower. The straight road to it ended in one narrow bridge across a deep but dry moat, outside which ran a ring of thorny hedges, but inside which rose great grisly iron spikes ; giant thorns such as are made by man. The completeness of its enclosure and isolation was part of an ancient national policy for the protection of an ancient national prize. For the building and the men in it were devoted to the defence of the treasure known as the Coat of the Hundred Stones, though there were now rather less than that number to be defended. According to the legend, the great King Hector, the almost prehistoric hero of those hills, had a corslet or breastplate which was a cluster of countless small diamonds, as a substitute for chain mail ; and in old dim pictures and tapestries he was always shown riding into battle as if in a vesture of stars. The legend had ramifications in neighbouring and rival realms ; and therefore the possession of this relic was a point of national and international importance in that land of legends. The legend may have been false ; but the

little loose jewels, or what were left of them, were real enough.

Drake stood looking at that sombre stronghold in an equally sombre spirit. It was the end of winter, and the grey woods were already just faintly empurpled with that suppressed and nameless bloom which is a foreshadowing rather than a beginning of the spring, but his own mood at the moment, though romantic, was also tragic. The string of strange events he had left in his track, if they had not arrested him as omens, must still have arrested him as enigmas. The man killed for no reason, the sword drawn for no reason, the speech broken short also for no reason, all these incidents affected him like the images in a warning dream. He felt that a cloud was on his destiny; nor was he wrong, so far at least as that evening's journey carried him. For when he re-entered that militant monastery of which he was the guest, a new catastrophe befell him. And when next day he again retraced his steps on the woodland path along which he had been looking when he fell, and when he came again to the house towards which he had looked so longingly, he found its door shut against him.

On the day following he was striding desperately along a new path, winding upwards through the woods to the hills beyond, with his back both to the house and the tower. For something, as has been hinted, had befallen him in the last few days which was not only a tragedy but a riddle; and it was only when he reviewed the whole in the light, or darkness, of his last disaster, that he remembered that he had one old friend in that land, and one who was a reader of such riddles. He was making his way to the hermitage that was the home—some might almost say the grave—of a great man now known only as Father Stephen, though his real name had once been scrawled on the historic treaties and sprawled in the newspaper headlines of many nations. There is no space here to tell all the activities of his once famous acumen. In the world of what has come to be called secret diplomacy he was something more than a secret diplomatist. He was one from whom no diplomacy

could be kept secret. Something of his later mysticism, an appreciation of moods and of the subconscious mind, had even then helped him ; he not only saw small things, but he saw them as large things, and largely. It was he who had anticipated the suicide of a cosmopolitan millionaire judging from an atmosphere and the fact that he did not wind up his watch. It was he also who had frustrated a great German conspiracy in America, detecting the Teutonic spy by his unembarrassed posture in a chair when a Boston lady was handing him tea. Now, at long and rare intervals, he would become conscious of such external problems ; and, in cases of great injustice, use the same powers to track a lost sheep, or recover the little hoard stolen from the stocking of a peasant.

A long terrace of low cliffs or rocks hollowed here and there ran along the top of a desolate slope that swept down and vanished amid the highest horns and crests of the winter trees. When this wall faced the rising of the sun, the stone shone pale like marble ; and in one place especially had the squared look of a human building, pierced by an unquestionably human entrance. In the white wall was a black doorway, hollow and almost horrible like a ghost ; for it was shaped in the rude outline of a man, with head and shoulders, like a mummy case. There was no other mark about this coffin-like cavity, except just beside it a flat coloured ikon of the Holy Family, drawn in that extreme decorative style of Eastern Christianity, which make a gaily painted diagram rather than a picture. But its gold and scarlet and green and sky-blue glittered on the rock by the black hole like some fabled butterfly from the mouth of the grave. But Bertram Drake strode to the gate of that grave and called aloud, as if upon the name of the dead.

To put the truth in a paradox, he had expected the resurrection to surprise him, and yet he was surprised unexpectedly. When he had last met his famous friend, in evening dress in the stalls of a great theatre in Vienna, he had found that friend pale and prematurely old, and his wit dreary and cynical. He even vaguely remembered the matter of their momentary conversation, some

disenchanted criticism about the drop-scene or curtain, in which the great diplomatist had seemed a shade more interested than in the play. But when the same man came out of that black hole in the bleak mountains he seemed to have recovered an almost unnatural youth and even childhood. The colours had come back into his strong face; and his eyes shone as he came out of the shadow, almost as an animal's will shine in the dark. The tonsure had left him a ring of chestnut hair, and his tall bony figure seemed less loose and more erect than of old. All this might be very rationally explained by the strong air and simple life of the hills; but his visitor, pursued and tormented by fancies, felt for the moment as if the man had a secret sun or fountain of life in that black chamber, or drew nourishment from the roots of the mountains.

He commented on the change in the first few greetings that passed between them; and the hermit seemed willing, though hardly able, to describe the nature of his acceptance of his strange estate.

'This is the last I shall see of this earth,' he said quietly, 'and I am more than contented in letting it pass. Yet I do not value it less, but rather I think more, as it simplifies itself to a single hold on life. What I know, with assurance, is that it is well for me to remain here, and to stray nowhere else.'

After a silence he added, gazing with his burning blue eyes across the wooded valley: 'Do you remember when we last met at that theatre and I told you that I always liked the picture on the curtain as much as the scenes of the play. It was some village landscape, I remember, with a bridge, and I felt perversely that I should like to lean on the bridge or look into the little houses. And then I remembered that from almost any other angle I should see it was only a thin painted rag. That is how I feel about this world, as I see it from this mountain. Not that it is not beautiful, for after all a curtain can be beautiful. Not even that it is unreal, for after all a curtain is real. But only that it is thin, and that the things behind it are the real drama. And I feel that when

I shift my place, it will be the end. I shall hear the three thuds of the mallet in the French theatres; and the curtain will rise. I shall be dead.'

The Englishman made an effort to shake off the clouds of mystery that had always been so uncongenial to him. 'Frankly,' he said, 'I can't profess to understand how a man of your intellect can brood in that superstitious way. You look healthy enough, but your mind is surely the more morbid for it. Do you really mean to tell me it would be a sin to leave this rat-hole?'

'No,' answered the other, 'I do not say it would be sin. I only say it would be death. It might conceivably be my duty to go down into the world again; in that case it would be my duty to die. It would have been my duty at any time when I was a soldier; but I never should have done it so cheerfully. Now, if ever I see my signal in the distance, I shall rise and leave this cavern, and leave this world.'

'How can you possibly tell?' cried Drake in his impatient way. 'Living alone in this wilderness you think you know everything, like a lunatic. Does nobody ever come to see you?'

'Oh, yes,' replied Father Stephen with a smile. 'The people from round here sometimes come up and ask me questions; they seem to have a notion that I can help them out of their difficulties.'

The dark vivacity of Drake's face took on a shade of something like shame, as he laughed uneasily and answered.

'And I ought to apologize for what I said just now about the lunatic. For I've come up here on the same errand myself. The truth is I have a notion that you can help me out of *my* difficulties.'

'I will do my best,' replied Father Stephen. 'I am afraid they have troubled you a good deal, by the look of you.'

They sat down side by side on a flat rock near the edge of the slope, and Bertram Drake began to tell the whole of his story, or all of it that he needed to tell.

'I needn't tell you,' he began, 'why I am in this

country, or why I have been so long a guest in that place where they keep the Coat of the Hundred Stones. You know better than anybody, for it was you who originally wanted an English representative here to write a report on their preservation, for the old propaganda purpose we know of. You probably also knew that the rules of that strange institution put even a friendly, and I may say an honoured, guest under very severe restrictions. They are so horribly afraid of any traffic with the outside world that I have had to be practically a prisoner. But the arrangements are stricter even than they were in your visiting days ; ever since Paul the new Abbot came from across the hills. I don't think you've seen him ; nobody's seen him outside the monastery ; and I couldn't describe him any more than I could describe you. But while you, somehow, still seem to include all kinds of things, like the circle of the world, he seems to be only one thing, like the point that is the pivot of a circle. He is as still as the centre of a whirlpool. I mean there seems to be direction and a driving speed in his very immobility ; but all pointed and simplified to a single thing : the guarding of the diamonds. He has repaired and made rigid the scheme of defence till I really do not think that loss or leakage from that treasure would be physically possible. Suffice it to say for the moment that it is kept in a casket of steel, in the centre of the roof garden, watched by the brethren who sleep only in rotation, and especially by the old abbot himself who hardly sleeps at all, except for a few hours just before and after sunset. And even then he sleeps sitting beside the casket, with which no man may meddle but himself, and with his hand on his heavy old gun, an antiquated blunderbuss enough, but with which he can shoot very straight for all that. Then sometimes he will wake quite softly and suddenly ; and sit looking up that straight road to where the crucifix stands, like an hoary old white eagle. His watch is his world ; though in every other way he is mild and benevolent, though he gave orders for the feeding of the poor for miles around, yet if he hears a footstep or faint movement anywhere in the woods around, except on the road

that is the recognized approach, he will shoot without mercy as at a wolf. I have reason to know this, as you shall hear.

'Anyhow, as I said, you know that the rules were always strict, and now they're stricter than ever. I was only able to enter the place by being hoisted up by a sort of crane or open-air lift, which it takes several of the monks together to work from the top; and I wasn't supposed to leave the place at all. It is possible that you also know, for you read people so rapidly like pictures rather than books, that I am a most unfortunate sort of brute to be chained by the leg in that way. My faults are all impatience and irreverence; and you may guess that, in a week or two, I might have felt inclined to burn the place down. But you cannot know the real and special reason that made my slavery intolerable.'

'I am sorry,' said Father Stephen; and the sincerity of the note again brought Drake's impatience to a standstill with abrupt self-reproach.

'Heaven knows it is I who should be sorry; I have been greatly to blame,' he said. 'But even if you call what I did a sin, you will see that it had a punishment. In one word, you are speaking to a man to whom no one in this country will speak. A monstrous accusation rests upon me, which I cannot refute, and have only some faint hope that you may refute for me. Hundreds in that valley below us are probably cursing my name, and even crying out for my death. And yet, I think, of all those scores of souls looking at me with suspicion, there is only one from whom I cannot endure it.'

'Does he live near here?' inquired the hermit.

'She does,' replied the Englishman.

An irony shining in the eyes of the anchorite suggested that the answer was not quite unexpected; but he said nothing till the other resumed his tale.

'You know that sort of château that some French nobleman, an exiled prince I believe, built upon the wooded ridge over there beyond the crucifix—you can just see its turrets from here. I'm not sure who owns it now; but it's been rented for some years by Dr. Amiel,

a famous physician, a Frenchman, or, rather, a French Jew. He is supposed to have high humanitarian ideals, including the idealization of this small nationality here, which, of course, suits our Foreign Office very well. Perhaps it's unfair to say he's only "supposed" to be this; and the plain truth is I'm not a fair judge of the man, for a reason you may soon guess. But apart from sentiment, I think somehow I am in two minds about him. It sounds absurd to say that like or dislike of a man could depend on his wearing a red smoking-cap. But that's the nearest I can get to it; bare-headed and just a little bald-headed, he seems only a dark, rather distinguished-looking French man of science, with a pointed beard. When he puts that red fez on he is suddenly something much lower than a Turk; and I see all Asia sneering and leering at me across the Levant. Well, perhaps it's a fancy of the fit I'm in; and it's only just to say that people believe in him, who are really devoted to this people or to our policy here. The people staying with him now, and during the few weeks I was there, are English and very keen on the cause, and they say his work has been splendid. A young fellow named Woodville, from my own college, who has travelled a lot and written some books about yachting, I think. And his sister.'

'Your story is very clear so far,' observed Father Stephen with restraint.

Drake seemed suddenly moved to impetuosity. 'I know I'm in a mad state and had no right to call you morbid; and it's a state in which it's awfully difficult to judge of people. How is it that two people, just a brother and sister, can be so alike and so different? They're both what is called good-looking; and even good-looking in the same way. Why on earth should her high colour look as clear as if it were pale, while his offends me as if it were painted? Why should I think of her hair as gold and look at his as if it were gilt? Honestly, I can't help feeling something artificial about him; but I didn't come to trouble you with these prejudices. There is little or nothing to be said against Woodville;

he has something of a name for betting on horses, but not enough to disturb any man of the world. I think the reputation has rather dogged his footsteps in the shape of his servant, Grimes, who is much more horsey than his master, and much in evidence. You see there were few servants at the château, even the gardening being done by a peasant from outside; an unfortunate fellow in horn spectacles who comes into this story later. Anyhow, Woodville was, or professed to be, quite sound in his politics about this place; and I really think him sincere about it. And as for his sister, she has an enthusiasm that is as beautiful as Joan of Arc's.

There was a short silence, and then Father Stephen said dreamily:

'In short, you somehow escaped from your prison, and paid her a visit.'

'Three visits,' replied Drake, with an embarrassed laugh, 'and nearly broke my neck at the end of a rope, besides being repeatedly shot at with a gun. I'll tell you later on, if you want them, all the details of how I managed to slip out and in again during those sunset hours of Abbot Paul's slumbers. They really resolved themselves into two; the accidental discovery of a disused iron chain, that had been used for the crane or lift, and the character of the old monk who happened to be watching while the Abbot slept. How indescribable is a man, and how huge are the things that turn on his unique self as on a hinge! All those monks were utterly incorruptible, and I owed it to a sympathy that was almost mockery. In an English romance, I suppose, my confederate would have been a young mutinous monk, dreaming of the loves he had lost; whereas my friend was one of the oldest, utterly loyal to the religious life, and helping me from a sort of whim that was little more than a lark. Can you imagine a sort of innocent Pandarus, or even a Christian Pan? He would have died rather than betray the holy stones; but when he was convinced that my love affair was honourable in itself, he let me down by the chain in fits of silent laughter, like a grinning old goblin. It was a pretty wild ex-

perience, I can tell you, swinging on that loose iron ladder, like dropping off the earth on a falling star. But I swung myself somehow clear of the spikes below, and crept along under the thick wood by the side of the road. Even as I did so came the crack and rolling echoes of the musket on the tower ; and a tuft, from a fir tree spreading above me, dropped detached upon the road at my right. A terrible old man, the Abbot. A light sleeper.'

Both men were gazing at the strange tower that rose out of the distant woods as Drake, after a pause, renewed his narrative.

'There is a high hedge of juniper and laurel at the bottom of the garden of Dr. Amiel's château. At least it is high on the outer side, rising above a sort of ledge of earth on the slope, but comparatively low when seen from the level garden above. I used to climb up to this ledge in that late afternoon twilight, and she used to come down the garden, with the lights of the house almost clinging about her dress, and we used to talk. It's no good talking to you about what she looked like, with her hair all as yellow light behind the leaves ; though those are the sort of things that make my present position a hell. You are a monk and not—I fear I was going to say not a man ; but at any rate not a lover.'

'I am not a juniper bush, if the argument be conclusive,' remarked Father Stephen. 'But I can admire it in its place ; and I know that many good things grow wild in the garden of God. But, if I may say so, seeing that so honourable a lady receives such rather eccentric attentions from you, I cannot see that you have much reason to be jealous of the poor Jewish gentleman, as you seem to be, even if he is so base and perfidious as to wear a smoking-cap.'

'What you say was true until yesterday,' said Drake. 'I know now that until yesterday I was in paradise. But I had gone there once too often ; and on my third return journey a thunderbolt struck me down, worse than any bullet from the tower. The old Abbot had never discovered my own evasion ; but he must have had miraculous hearing when he woke, for every time I crept through

the thicket, as softly as I could, he must have heard something moving, and fired again and again. Well, the last time I found the spectacled peasant who worked for Dr. Amiel, he was lying dead, a little way in front of the cross, and a foreign-looking fellow with a drawn sabre standing near him. But the strange thing was that the sabre was unstained and unused, and I was eventually convinced that one of the Abbot's shot must have killed the poor peasant in the goggles. Revolving all these things in growing doubt, I returned to the tower, and saw an ominous thing. The regular mechanical lift was lowered for me; and when I re-entered the place, I found that all my escapade had been discovered. But I found something far worse.

'When all those faces were turned upon me, faces I shall never forget, I knew I was being judged for something more than a love-affair. My poor old friend, who had connived at my escape, would not have been so much prostrated for the lesser matter; and as for the Abbot, the form of his countenance was changed, as it says in the Bible, by something nearer to his own lonely soul than all such lesser matters. Well, the truth of this tragedy is soon told. For the last week, as it appeared, the hoard of the little diamonds had dwindled, no man could imagine how. They were counted by the Abbot and two monks at certain regular intervals; and it was found that the losses had occurred at definite intervals also. Finally, there was found another fact; a fact of which I can make no sense; yet a fact to which I can find no answer. After each of my secret visits to the château, and then only, some of the diamonds had disappeared.

'I have not even the right to ask you to believe in my innocence. No man alive in the whole great landscape we are looking at believes in my innocence. I do not know what would have happened to me, or whether I should have been killed by the monks or the peasants, if I had not appealed to your great authority in this country; and if the Abbot had not been persuaded at last to allow the appeal. Dr. Amiel thinks I am guilty.

Woodville thinks I am guilty. His sister I have not even been able to see.'

There was another silence, and then Father Stephen remarked rather absently :

'Does he wear slippers as well as a smoking-cap ?'

'Do you mean the doctor ? No. What on earth do you mean ?'

'Nothing at all, if he doesn't. There's no more to be said about that. Well, it's pretty obvious, I suppose, what are the next three questions. First, I suppose the woodman carried an axe. Did he ever carry a pickaxe ? Did he ever carry any other tool in particular ? Second, did you ever happen to hear anything like a bell ? About the time you heard the shot, for instance ? But that will probably have occurred to you already. And third, amid such plain preliminaries in the matter, is Dr. Amiel fond of birds ?'

There was again a shadow of irony in the simplicity of the recluse ; and Drake turned his dark face towards him with a doubtful frown.

'Are you making fun of me ?' he asked. 'I should prefer to know.'

'I believe in your innocence, if that is what you mean,' replied Father Stephen, 'and, believe me, I am beginning at the right end in order to establish it.'

'But who could it be ?' cried Drake in his rather irritable fashion. 'I'll tell the plain truth, even against myself, and I'd swear all those monks were really startled out of their wits. And even the peasants near here, supposing they could get into the tower, which they can't—why, I'd be as much surprised to hear of them desecrating the Hundred Stones as if I heard they'd all suddenly become Plymouth Brethren this morning. No ; suspicion is sure to fall on the foreigners, like myself ; and none of the others round here have a case against them, as I have. Woodville may have a few racing debts ; but I'd never believe this about *her* brother, little as I happened to like him. And as for Dr. Amiel——' And he stopped, his face darkening with thought.

'Yes, but that's beginning at the wrong end,' observed

Father Stephen, 'because it's beginning with all the millions of mankind, and every man a mystery. I am trying to find out who stole the stones; you seem to be trying to find out who wanted to steal them. Believe me, the smaller and more practical question is also the larger and more philosophical. To the shades of possible wanting there is hardly any limit. It is the root of all religion that anybody may be almost anything if he chooses. The cynics are wrong, not because they say that the heroes may be cowards, but because they do not see that the cowards may be heroes. Now you may think my remark about keeping birds very wild and your remark about betting on horses very relevant, but I assure you it is the other way round; for yours dealt with what might be thought, but mine with what could be done. Do you remember that German Prime Minister who was assassinated because he had reduced Russia to starvation? Millions of peasants might have wanted to murder him; but how could a moujik in Muscovy murder him in a theatre in Munich? He was murdered by a man who came there because he was a trained Russian dancer, and escaped from there because he was a trained Russian acrobat. That is, the highly offensive statesman in question was not killed by all the Russians who may have wanted to kill him; but the one Russian who *could* kill him. Well, you are the only approximate acrobat in this performance, and, apart from what I know about you, I don't see how you could have burgled a safe inside the tower merely by dangling at the end of a string outside it. For the real enigma and obstacle in this story is not the stone tower, but the steel casket. I do not see how *you* could have stolen the jewels. I don't see how *anybody* could have stolen them. That is the hopeful part of it.'

'You are pretty paradoxical to-day,' growled his English friend.

'I am quite practical,' answered Stephen serenely. 'That is the starting-point, and it makes a good start. We have only to deal with a narrow number of conjectures about how it could just conceivably have been done.'

You scoffed at my three questions just now which I threw off when I was thinking rather about the preliminary approach to the tower. Well, I admit they were very long shots—indeed, very wild shots; I did not myself take them very seriously, or think they would lead to much. But they had this value: that they were not random guesses about the spiritual possibilities of everybody for a hundred miles round. They were the beginnings of an effort to bridge the real difficulties.'

'I am afraid,' observed Drake, 'that I did not realise that they were even that.'

'Well,' the hermit went on patiently, 'for the first problem of reaching the tower it was reasonable to think first, however hazily, of some sort of secret tunnel or subterranean entrance, and it was natural to ask if the strange workman at the château, who afterwards died so mysteriously, was seen carrying any excavating tools.'

'Well, I did think of that,' assented Drake, 'and I came to the conclusion that it was physically impossible. The inside of the tower is as plain and bare as a dry cistern and the floor is really solid concrete everywhere. But what did you mean by that second question about the bell?'

'What I confess still puzzles me,' said Father Stephen, 'even in your own story, is how the Abbot always heard a man threading his way through a thick forest so far below, so that he invariably fired after him, if only at a venture. Now, nothing would be more natural to such a scheme of defence than to set traps in the wood, in the way of burglar alarms, to warn the watchers in the tower. But anything like that would mean some system of wires or tubes passing through the wall into the woods, and anything of that sort I felt in a shadowy way, a very shadowy way indeed, might mean a passage for other things as well. It would destroy the argument of the sheer wall and the dead drop, which is at present an argument against you, since you alone dared to drop over it. And, of course, my third random question was of the same kind. Nothing could fly about the top of that high

tower except birds. For I infer that the vigilant Paul was not too absent-minded to notice any large number of aeroplanes. Now, it is not in the least probable—it is, indeed, almost wildly improbable—but it is not *impossible*, that birds should be trained either to take messages or to commit thefts. Carrier pigeons do the former, and parrots and magpies have often done the latter. Dr. Amiel, being both a scientist and a humanitarian, I thought he might very well be a naturalist and an animal-lover. So if I had found his biological studies specializing wholly on the breeding of carrier pigeons, or if I had found all the love of his life lavished on a particular magpie, I should have thought the question worth following up, formidable as would have been the difficulties still threatening it as a solution.

‘I wish the love of his life *were* lavished on a magpie,’ observed Bertram Drake bitterly. ‘As it is, it’s lavished on something else, and will be expected, I suppose, to flourish in the blight of mine. But, much as I hate him, I shouldn’t like to say of him what he is probably saying of me.’

‘There again is the mistaken method,’ observed the other. ‘Probably he is not morally incapable of a really bad action; very few people are. That is why I stick to the point of whether he is materially capable. It would be quite easy to draw a dark suspicious picture both of him and Mr. Woodville. It is quite true that racing can be a raging gamble and that ruined gamblers are capable of almost anything. It is also true that nobody can be so much of a cad as a gentleman when he is afraid of losing that title. In the same way, it is perfectly true that the Jews have woven over these nations a net that is not only international but anti-national; and it is quite true that inhuman as is their usury and inhuman as is often their oppression of the poor, some of them are never so inhuman as when they are idealistic, never so inhuman as when they are humane. If we were talking about Amiel or about Woodville, instead of about you and about the diamonds, I could trace a thousand mystery stories in the matter. I could take your hint about the scarlet

smoking-cap, and say it was a signal and the symbol of a secret society ; that a hundred Jews in a hundred smoking-caps were plotting everywhere, as many of them really are ; I could show a conspiracy ramifying from the red cap of Amiel as it did from the *Bonnet Rouge* of Almereyda ; or I could catch at your idle phrase about Woodville's hair looking gilded, and describe him as a monstrous decadent in a golden wig, a thing worthy of Nero. Very soon his horse-racing would have all the imperial insanity of charioteering in the amphitheatre, while his friend in the fez would be capable of carrying off Miss Woodville to a whole harem full of Miss Woodvilles, if you will pardon the image. But what corrects all this is the concrete difficulty I defined at the beginning. I still do not see how wearing either a red fez or a gilded wig could conjure very small gems out of a steel box at the top of a tower. But of course I did not mean to abandon all inquiry about the suspicious movements of anybody. I asked if the doctor wore slippers, on a remote chance in connexion with your steps having been heard in the wood, and I should like to know if you ever met anybody else prowling about in the forest.'

'Why, yes,' said Drake, with a slight start. 'I once met the man Grimes, now I remember it.'

'Mr. Woodville's servant,' remarked Father Stephen.

'Yes. A rat of a fellow with red hair,' Drake said, frowning. 'He seemed a bit startled to see me too.'

'Well, never mind,' answered the hermit. 'My own hair may be called red, but I assure you I didn't steal the diamonds.'

'I never met anybody else,' went on Drake, 'except, of course, the mysterious man with the sabre and the dead man he was staring at. I think that is the queerest puzzle of all.'

'It is best to apply the same principle even to that,' replied his friend. 'It may be hard to imagine what a man could be doing with a drawn sword still unused. But, after all, there are a thousand things he might have been doing, from teaching the poor woodman to cut timber without an axe to cutting off the dead man's head

for a trophy and a talisman, as some savages do. The question is whether felling the whole forest or filling the whole country with howling head-hunters would necessarily have got the stones out of the box.'

'He was certainly going to do something,' said Drake in a low voice. 'He said himself, "I was going to," and then broke off and vanished. I was very profoundly persuaded, I hardly knew why, that there was something to be done to the dead man which could not be done till he was dead.'

'What?' asked the hermit, after an abrupt silence; and it sounded somehow like a new voice from a third person suddenly joining in the conversation.

'Which could not be done till he was dead,' repeated Drake, staring at him.

'Dead,' repeated Father Stephen.

And Drake, still staring at him, saw that his face, under its fringe of red hair, was as pale as his linen robe, and the eyes in it were blazing like the lost stones.

'So many things die,' he said. 'The birds I spoke about, flying and flashing about the great tower. Did you ever find a dead bird? Not one sparrow, it is written, falls to the ground without God. Even a dead bird would be precious. But a yet smaller thing will serve as a sign here.'

Drake, still gazing at his companion, felt a growing conviction that the man had suddenly gone mad. He said helplessly, 'What is the matter with you?' But Father Stephen had risen from his seat and was gazing calmly across the valley towards the west, which was all swimming with a golden sunlight that here and there turned the tops of the grey trees to silver.

'It is the thud of the mallet,' he said, 'and the curtain must rise.'

Something had certainly happened which the mind of Bertram Drake found it impossible at the moment to measure, but he remembered enough of the strange words with which their interview had opened to know that in some way the hermit was saying farewell to the hermitage and to many more human things. He asked some

groping question, the very words of which he could not afterwards recall.

'I see my signal at last,' said Father Stephen. 'Treason stands up in my own land as that tower stands in the landscape. A great sin against the people and against the glory of the dead is raging in that valley like a lost battle. And I must go down and do my last office, as King Hector came down from these mountains to his last battle long ago, to that Battle of the Stones where he was slain and his sacred coat of mail so nearly captured. For the enemy has come again over the hills, though in a shape in which we never looked for him.'

The voice that had lately lingered with irony and shrewdness over the details of detection had the simplicity which makes poetry and primitive rhetoric still possible among such peoples. He was already marching down the slope, leaving Drake wavering in doubt, being uncertain to tell the truth, whether his own problem had not been rather lost in this last transition.

'Oh, do not fear for your own story,' said Father Stephen. 'The Battle of the Stones was a victory.'

As they went down the mountain-side Drake followed with a strange sense of travelling with some immobile thing liberated by a miracle, as if the earth were shaken by a stone statue walking. The statue led him a strange and rather erratic dance, however, covering considerable time and distance, and the great cloud in the west was a sunset cloud before they came to their final halt. Rather to Drake's surprise, they passed the tower of the monastery, and already seemed to be passing under the shadow of the great wooden cross in the woods.

'We shall return this way to-night,' said Stephen, speaking for the first time on their march. 'The sin upon this land to-night lies so heavy that there is no other way. *Via Crucis*.'

'Why do you talk in this terrible way?' broke out Drake abruptly. 'Don't you realize that it's enough to make a man like me hate the cross? Indeed, I think by this time I really do. Remember what my story is, and what once made these woodlands wonderful to me.'

Would you blame me if the god I saw among the trees was a pagan god, and at any rate a happy one? This is a wild garden that was full, for me, of love and laughter; and I look up and see that image blackening the sun and saying that the world is utterly evil.'

'You do not understand,' replied Father Stephen quite quietly. 'If there are any who stand apart merely because the world is utterly evil, they are not old monks like me; they are much more likely to be young Byronic disappointed lovers like you. No, it is the optimist much more than the pessimist who finally finds the cross waiting for him at the end of his own road. It is the thing that remains when all is said, like the payment after the feast. Christendom is full of feasts, but they bear the names of martyrs who won them in torments. And if such things horrify you, go and ask what torments your English soldiers endure for the land which your English poets praise. Go and see your English children playing with fireworks, and you will find one of their toys is named after the torture of St. Catherine. No, it is not that the world is rubbish and that we throw it away. It is exactly when the whole world of stars is a jewel, like the jewels we have lost, that we remember the price. And we look up, as you say, in this dim thicket and see the price, which was the death of God.'

After a silence he added, like one in a dream: 'And the death of man. We shall return by this way to-night.'

Drake had the best reasons for being aware of the direction in which their way was now taking them. The familiar path scrambled up the hill to a familiar hedge of juniper, behind which rose the steep roof of a dark mansion. He could even hear voices talking on the lawn behind the hedge, and a note or two of one which changed the current of his blood. He stopped and said in a voice heavy as stone:

'I cannot go in here now. Not for the world.'

'Very well,' replied Father Stephen calmly. 'I think you have waited outside before now.'

And he composedly entered the garden by a gate in the hedge, leaving Drake gloomily kicking his heels on the

ledge or natural terrace outside, where he had often waited in happier times. As he did so he could not help hearing fragments of the distant conversation in the garden; and they filled him with confusion and conjecture, not, however, unmingled with hope. It seemed probable that Father Stephen was stating Drake's case and probably offering to prove his innocence. But he must also have been making a sort of appointment, for Drake heard Woodville say: 'I can't make head or tail of this, but we will follow later if you insist.' And Stephen replied with something ending with 'the cross in half an hour.'

Then Drake heard the voice of the girl, saying: 'I shall pray to God that you may yet tell us better news.'

'You will be told,' said Father Stephen.

As they redescended towards the little hill just in front of the crucifix, Drake was in a less mutinous mood; whether this was due to the hermit's speech or the words about prayer that had fallen from the woman in the garden. The sky was at once clearer and cloudier than in the previous sunset, for the light and darkness seemed divided by deeper abysses; grey and purple cloudlands as large as landscapes now overcasting the whole earth and now falling again before fresh chasms of light; vast changes that gave to a few hours of evening something of the enormous revolutions of the nights and days. The wall of cloud was then rising higher on the heights behind them and spreading over the château; but the western half of heaven was a clear gold where the lonely cross stood dark against it. But as they drew nearer they saw that it was in truth less lonely, for a man was standing beneath it. Drake saw a long gun aslant on his back; it was the bearded man of the sabre.

The hermit strode towards him with a strange energy and struck him on the shoulder with the flat of his hand.

'Go home,' he said, 'and tell your masters that their plot will work no longer. If you are Christians, and ever had any part in a holy relic, or any right to it in your land beyond the hills, you will know you should not seek it by such tricks. Go in peace.'

Drake hardly noticed how quickly the man vanished this time, for his eye was fixed on the hermit's finger which seemed idly tracing patterns on the wooden pedestal of the cross. It was really pointing to certain perforations like holes made by worms in the wood.

'Some of the Abbot's stray shots, I think,' he remarked. 'And somebody has been picking them out of the wood strangely enough.'

'It is unlucky,' observed Drake, 'that the Abbot should damage one of your own images; he is as much devoted to the relic as to the realm.'

'More,' said the hermit, sitting down on the knoll a few yards before the pedestal. 'The Abbot, as you truly say, has only room for one idea in his mind. But there is no doubt of his concern about the stones.'

A great canopy of cloud had again covered the valley, turning twilight almost to darkness; and Stephen spoke out of the dark.

'As for the realm, the Abbot comes from the country beyond the hills, which hundreds of years ago went to war about—'

His words were lost in a distant explosion. A volley had been fired from the tower.

With the first shock of sound Stephen sprang up and stood erect on the little hillock. The world had grown so dark that his attitude could hardly be seen, but as minute followed minute in the interval of silence, a low red light was again gradually released from the drifting cloud, faintly tracing his grey figure in silver and turning his tawny hair to a ring of dim crimson. He was standing quite rigid with his arms stretched out, like a shadow of the crucifix. Drake was striving with the words of a question that would not come. And there then came anew a noise of death from the tower; and the hermit fell all his length crashing among the undergrowth, and lay still as a stone.

Drake hardly knew how he lifted the head on to the wooden pedestal; but the face gave ghastly assurance, and the voice in the few words it could speak was like the voice of a new-born child, weak and small.

'I am dying,' said Father Stephen. 'I am dying with the truth in my heart.'

He made another effort to speak, beginning 'I wish——' and then his friend, looking at him steadily, saw that he was dead.

Bertram Drake stood up, and all his universe lay in ruins around him. The night of annihilation was more absolute because a match had flamed and gone out before it could light the lamp. He was certain now that Stephen had indeed discovered the truth that could deliver him. He was as clearly certain that no other man would ever discover it. He would go blasted to his grave because his friend had died only a moment too soon. And to put a final touch to the hideous irony, that had lifted him to heaven and cast him down, he heard the voices of his friends coming along the road from the château.

In a sort of tumbled dream he saw Dr. Amiel lift the body on to the pedestal, producing surgical instruments for the last hopeless surgical tests. The doctor had his back to Drake, who did not trouble to look over his shoulder, but stared at the ground until the doctor said :

'I fear he is quite dead. But I have extracted the bullet.'

There was something odd about his quiet voice, and the group seemed suddenly, if silently, seething with new emotions. The girl gave an exclamation of wonder, and it seemed of joy, which Drake could not comprehend.

'I am glad I extracted the bullet,' said Dr. Amiel. 'I fancy that's what Drake's friend with the sabre was trying to extract.'

'We certainly owe Drake a complete apology,' observed Woodville.

Drake thrust his head over the other's shoulder, and saw what they were all staring at. The shot that had struck Stephen in the heart lay a few inches from his body, and it not only glittered but sparkled. It sparkled as only one stone can sparkle in the world.

The girl was standing beside him and he appreciated, through the turmoil, the sense of an obstacle rolled away and of a growth and future, and even in all those growing

woods the promise of the spring. It was only as the tail of a trailing and vanishing nightmare that he appreciated at last the wild tale of the treason of the foreign Abbot from beyond the hills, and in what strange fashion he loaded his large-mouthed gun. But he continued to gaze at the dazzling speck on the pedestal and saw in it as in a mirror all the past words of his friend.

For Stephen the hermit had died indeed with the truth in his heart; and the truth had been taken out of his heart by the forceps of a wondering Jew; and it lay there on the pedestal of the cross, like the soul drawn out of his body. Nor did it seem unnatural, to the man staring at it, that the soul looked like a star.

From *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (by kind permission of Mr. G. K. Chesterton and Messrs. Cassell & Co., Ltd.).

SIR ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH

1863—

THE TWO HOUSEHOLDERS

Extract from the Memoirs of Gabriel Foot, Highwayman.

I WILL say this—speaking as accurately as a man may, so long afterwards—that when first I spied the house it put no desire in me but just to give thanks.

For conceive my case. It was near midnight, and ever since dusk I had been tramping the naked moors, in the teeth of as vicious a nor'-wester as ever drenched a man to the skin, and then blew the cold home to his marrow. My clothes were sodden; my coat-tails flapped with a noise like pistol-shots; my boots squeaked as I went. Overhead, the October moon was in her last quarter, and might have been a slice of finger-nail for all the light she afforded. Two-thirds of the time the wrack blotted her out altogether; and I, with my stick clipped tight under my armpit, eyes puckered up, and head bent aslant, had to keep my wits alive to distinguish the road from the black heath to right and left. For three hours I had met neither man nor man's dwelling, and (for all I knew) was desperately lost. Indeed, at the cross-roads, two miles back, there had been nothing for me but to choose the way that kept the wind on my face, and it gnawed me like a dog.

Mainly to allay the stinging of my eyes, I pulled up at last, turned right-about-face, leant back against the blast with a hand on my hat, and surveyed the blackness behind. It was at this instant that, far away to the left, a point of light caught my notice, faint but steady; and at once I felt sure it burnt in the window of a house.

'The house,' thought I, 'is a good mile off, beside the other road, and the light must have been an inch over my hat-brim for the last half-hour.' This reflection—that on so wide a moor I had come near missing the information I wanted (and perhaps a supper) by one inch—sent a strong thrill down my back.

I cut straight across the heather towards the light, risking quags and pitfalls. Nay, so heartening was the chance to hear a fellow creature's voice, that I broke into a run, skipping over the stunted gorse that cropped up here and there, and dreading every moment to see the light quenched. 'Suppose it burns in an upper window, and the family is going to bed, as would be likely at this hour—' The apprehension kept my eyes fixed on the bright spot, to the frequent scandal of my legs, that within five minutes were stuck full of gorse prickles.

But the light did not go out, and soon a flicker of moonlight gave me a glimpse of the house's outline. It proved to be a deal more imposing than I looked for—the outline, in fact, of a tall, square barrack, with a cluster of chimneys at either end, like ears, and a high wall, topped by the roofs of some outbuildings concealing the lower windows. There was no gate in this wall, and presently I guessed the reason. I was approaching the place from behind, and the light came from a back window on the first floor.

The faintness of the light also was explained by this time. It shone behind a drab-coloured blind, and in shape resembled the stem of a wine-glass, broadening out at the foot; an effect produced by the half-drawn curtains within. I came to a halt, waiting for the next ray of moonlight. At the same moment a rush of wind swept over the chimney-stacks, and on the wind there seemed to ride a human sigh.

On this last point I may err. The gust had passed some seconds before I caught myself detecting this peculiar note, and trying to disengage it from the natural chords of the storm. From the next gust it was absent; and then, to my dismay, the light faded from the window.

I was half-minded to call out when it appeared again,

this time in two windows—those next on the right to that where it had shone before. Almost at once it increased in brilliance, as if the person who carried it from the smaller room to the larger were lighting more candles; and now the illumination was strong enough to make fine gold threads of the rain that fell within its radiance, and fling two shafts of warm yellow over the coping of the back wall. During the minute or more that I stood watching, no shadow fell on either blind.

Between me and the wall ran a ditch, into which the ground at my feet broke sharply away. Setting my back to the storm again, I followed the lip of this ditch around the wall's angle. Here it shallowed and here, too, was shelter; but not wishing to mistake a bed of nettles or any such pitfall for solid earth, I kept pretty wide as I went on. The house was dark on this side, and the wall, as before, had no opening. Close beside the next angle there grew a mass of thick gorse bushes, and pushing through these I found myself suddenly on a sound high-road, with the wind tearing at me as furiously as ever.

But here was the front; and I now perceived that the surrounding wall advanced some way before the house, so as to form a narrow courtlage. So much of it, too, as faced the road had been whitewashed, which made it an easy matter to find the gate. But as I laid hand on its latch I had a surprise.

A line of paving-stones led from the gate to a heavy porch; and along the wet surface of these there fell a streak of light from the front door, which stood ajar.

That a door should remain six inches open on such a night was astonishing enough, until I entered the court and found it as still as a room, owing to the high wall. But looking up and assuring myself that all the rest of the façade was black as ink, I wondered at the carelessness of the inmates.

It was here that my professional instinct received the first jog. Abating the sound of my feet on the paving-stones, I went up to the door and pushed it softly. It opened without noise.

I stepped into a fair-sized hall of modern build, paved

with red tiles and lit with a small hanging-lamp. To right and left were doors leading to the ground-floor rooms. Along the wall by my shoulder ran a line of pegs, on which hung half-a-dozen hats and great-coats, every one of clerical shape ; and full in front of me a broad staircase ran up, with a staring Brussels carpet, the colours and pattern of which I can recall as well as I can to-day's breakfast. Under this staircase was set a stand full of walking-sticks, and a table littered with gloves, brushes, a hand-bell, a riding crop, one or two dog-whistles, and a bedroom candle, with tinder-box beside it. This, with one notable exception, was all the furniture.

The exception—which turned me cold—was the form of a yellow mastiff dog, curled on a mat beneath the table. The arch of his back was towards me, and one forepaw lay over his nose in a natural posture of sleep. I leant back on the wainscotting with my eyes tightly fixed on him, and my thoughts sneaking back, with something of regret, to the storm I had come through.

But a man's habits are not easily denied. At the end of three minutes the dog had not moved, and I was down on the door-mat unlacing my soaked boots. Slipping them off, and taking them in my left hand, I stood up, and tried a step towards the stairs, with eyes alert for any movement of the mastiff ; but he never stirred. I was glad enough, however, on reaching the stairs, to find them newly built, and the carpet thick. Up I went, with a glance at every step for the table which now hid the brute's form from me, and never a creak did I wake out of that staircase till I was almost at the first landing, when my toe caught a loose stair-rod, and rattled it in a way that stopped my heart for a moment, and then set it going in double-quick time.

I stood still with a hand on the rail. My eyes were now on a level with the floor of the landing, out of which branched two passages—one turning sharply to my right, the other straight in front, so that I was gazing down the length of it. Almost at the end, a parallelogram of light fell across it from an open door.

A man who has once felt it knows there is only one kind of silence that can fitly be called 'dead.' This is only to be found in a great house at midnight. I declare that for a few seconds after I rattled the stair-rod you might have cut the silence with a knife. If the household held a clock, it ticked inaudibly.

Upon this silence, at the end of a minute, broke a light sound—the *tink-tink* of a decanter on the rim of a wine-glass. It came from the room where the light was.

Now perhaps it was that the very thought of liquor put warmth into my cold bones. It is certain that all of a sudden I straightened my back, took the remaining stairs at two strides, and walked down the passage as bold as brass, without caring a jot for the noise I made.

In the doorway I halted. The room was long, lined for the most part with books bound in what they call 'divinity calf,' and littered with papers like a barrister's table on assize day. A leathern elbow-chair faced the fireplace, where a few coals burned sulkily, and beside it, on the corner of a writing table, were set an unlit candle and a pile of manuscripts. At the opposite end of the room a curtained door led (as I guessed) to the chamber that I had first seen illuminated. All this I took in with the tail of my eye, while staring straight in front, where, in the middle of a great square of carpet, between me and the windows, stood a table with a red cloth upon it. On this cloth were a couple of wax candles lit, in silver stands, a tray, and a decanter three-parts full of brandy. And between me and the table stood a man.

He stood sideways, leaning a little back, as if to keep his shadow off the threshold, and looked at me over his left shoulder—a bald, grave man, slightly under the common height, with a long clerical coat of preposterous fit hanging loosely from his shoulders, a white cravat, black breeches, and black stockings. His feet were loosely thrust into carpet slippers. I judged his age at fifty, or thereabouts; but his face rested in the shadow, and I could only note a pair of eyes, very small and alert, twinkling above a large expanse of cheek.

He was lifting a wine-glass from the table at the moment when I appeared, and it trembled now in his right hand. I heard a spilt drop or two fall on the carpet. This was all the evidence he showed of discomposure.

Setting the glass back, he felt in his breast-pocket for a handkerchief, failed to find one, and rubbed his hands together to get the liquor off his fingers.

'You startled me,' he said, in a matter-of-fact tone, turning his eyes upon me, as he lifted his glass again, and emptied it. 'How did you find your way in?'

'By the front door,' said I, wondering at his unconcern.

He nodded his head slowly.

'Ah! yes; I forgot to lock it. You came to steal, I suppose?'

'I came because I'd lost my way. I've been travelling this God-forsaken moor since dusk——'

'With your boots in your hand,' he put in quietly.

'I took them off out of respect to the yellow dog you keep.'

'He lies in a very natural attitude—eh?'

'You don't tell me he was *stuffed*?'

The old man's eyes beamed a contemptuous pity.

'You are indifferent sharp, my dear sir, for a house-breaker. Come in. Set down those convicting boots, and don't drip pools of water in the doorway. If I must entertain a burglar, I prefer him tidy.'

He walked to the fire, picked up a poker, and knocked the coals into a blaze. This done, he turned round on me with the poker still in his hand. The serenest gravity sat on his large, pale features.

'Why have I done this?' he asked.

'I suppose to get possession of the poker.'

'Quite right. May I inquire your next move?'

'Why?' said I, feeling in my tail-pocket, 'I carry a pistol.'

'Which I suppose to be damp?'

'By no means. I carry it, as you see, in an oil-cloth case.'

He stooped and laid the poker carefully in the fender.

‘That is a stronger card than I possess. I might urge that by pulling the trigger you would certainly alarm the house and the neighbourhood, and put a halter round your neck. But it strikes me as safer to assume you capable of using a pistol with effect at three paces. With what might happen subsequently I will not pretend to be concerned. The fate of your neck’—he waved a hand,—‘Well, I have known you for just five minutes, and feel but a moderate interest in your neck. As for the inmates of this house, it will refresh you to hear that there are none. I have lived here two years with a butler and female cook, both of whom I dismissed yesterday at a minute’s notice, for conduct which I will not shock your ears by explicitly naming. Suffice it to say, I carried them off yesterday to my parish church, two miles away, married them and dismissed them in the vestry without characters. I wish you had known that butler—but excuse me; with the information I have supplied, you ought to find no difficulty in fixing the price you will take to clear out of my house instant.’

‘Sir,’ I answered, ‘I have held a pistol at one or two heads in my time, but never at one stuffed with nobler indiscretion. Your chivalry does not, indeed, disarm me, but prompts me to desire more of your acquaintance. I have found a gentleman, and must sup with him before I make terms.’

This address seemed to please him. He shuffled across the room to a sideboard, and produced a plate of biscuits, another of dried figs, a glass, and two decanters.

‘Sherry and Madeira,’ he said. ‘There is also a cold pie in the larder, if you care for it.’

‘A biscuit will serve,’ I replied. ‘To tell the truth, I’m more for the bucket than the manger, as the grooms say: and the brandy you were tasting just now is more to my mind than wine.’

‘There is no water handy.’

‘I have soaked in enough to-night to last me with this bottle.’

I pulled over a chair, laid my pistol on the table, and held out the glass for him to fill. Having done so, he

helped himself to a glass and a chair, and sat down facing me.

'I was speaking, just now, of my late butler,' he began, with a sip at his brandy. 'Does it strike you that, when confronted with moral delinquency, I am apt to let my indignation get the better of me?'

'Not at all,' I answered heartily, refilling my glass.

It appeared that another reply would have pleased him better.

'H'm. I was hoping that, perhaps, I had visited his offence too strongly. As a clergyman, you see, I was bound to be severe; but upon my word, sir, since Parkinson left I have felt like a man who has lost a limb.'

He drummed with his fingers on the cloth for a few moments, and went on—

'One has a natural disposition to forgive butlers—Pharaoh, for instance, felt it. There hovers around butlers an atmosphere in which common ethics lose their pertinence. But mine was a rare bird—a black swan among butlers! He was more than a butler: he was a quick and brightly gifted man. Of the accuracy of his taste, and the unusual scope of his endeavour, you will be able to form some opinion when I assure you he modelled himself upon *me*.'

I bowed, over my brandy.

'I am a scholar: yet I employed him to read aloud to me, and derived pleasure from his intonation. I talk with refinement: yet he learned to answer me in language as precise as my own. My cast-off garments fitted him not more irreproachably than did my amenities of manner. Divest him of his tray, and you would find his mode of entering a room hardly distinguishable from my own—the same urbanity, the same alertness of carriage, the same superfine deference towards the weaker sex. All—all my idiosyncrasies I saw reflected in him; and can you doubt that I was gratified? He was my *alter ego*—which, by the way, makes it harder for me to pardon his behaviour with the cook.'

'Look here,' I broke in; 'you want a new butler?'

'Oh, you really grasp that fact, do you?' he retorted.

'Why, then,' said I, 'let me cease to be your burglar and let me continue here as your butler.'

He leant back, spreading out the fingers of each hand on the table's edge.

'Believe me,' I went on, 'you might do worse. I have been in my time a demy of Magdalen College, Oxford, and retain some Greek and Latin. I'll undertake to read the Fathers with an accent that shall not offend you. My taste in wine is none the worse for having been formed in other men's cellars. Moreover, you shall engage the ugliest cook in Christendom, so long as I'm your butler. I've taken a liking to you—that's flat—and I apply for the post.'

'I give forty pounds a year,' said he.

'And I'm cheap at that price.'

He filled up his glass, looking up at me while he did so with the air of one digesting a problem. From first to last his face was grave as a judge's.

'We are too impulsive, I think,' was his answer, after a minute's silence; 'and your speech smacks of the amateur. You say, "Let me cease to be your burglar and let me be your butler." The aspiration is respectable; but a man might as well say, "Let me cease to write sermons, let me paint pictures." And truly, sir, you impress me as no expert even in your present trade.'

'On the other hand,' I argued, 'consider the moderation of my demands; that alone should convince you of my desire to turn over a new leaf. I ask for a month's trial; if at the end of that time I don't suit, you shall say so, and I'll march from your door with nothing in my pocket but my month's wages. Be hanged, sir! but when I reflect on the amount you'll have to pay to get me to face to-night's storm again, you seem to be getting off dirt cheap!' cried I, slapping my palm on the table.

'Ah, if you had only known Parkinson!' he exclaimed.

Now the third glass of clean spirit has always a deplorable effect on me. It turns me from bright to black, from levity to extreme sulkiness. I have done more wickedness over this third tumbler than in all the other

states of comparative inebriety within my experience. So now I glowered at my companion and cursed.

'Look here, I don't want to hear any more of Parkinson, and I've a pretty clear notion of the game you're playing. You want to make me drink, and you're ready to sit prattling there plying me till I drop under the table.'

'Do me the favour to remember that you came, and are staying, on your own motion. As for the brandy, I would remind you that I suggested a milder drink. Try some Madeira.'

He handed me the decanter, as he spoke, and I poured out a glass.

'Madeira!' said I, taking a gulp, 'Ugh! it's the commonest Marsala!'

I had no sooner said the words than he rose up, and stretched a hand gravely across to me.

'I hope you will shake it,' he said; 'though, as a man who after three glasses of neat spirit can distinguish between Madeira and Marsala, you have every right to refuse me. Two minutes ago you offered to become my butler, and I demurred. I now beg you to repeat that offer. Say the word, and I employ you gladly: you shall even have the second decanter (which contains genuine Madeira) to take to bed with you.'

We shook hands on our bargain, and catching up a candle-stick, he led the way from the room.

Picking up my boots, I followed him along the passage and down the silent staircase. In the hall he paused to stand on tip-toe, and turn up the lamp, which was burning low. As he did so, I found time to fling a glance at my old enemy, the mastiff. He lay as I had first seen him—a stuffed dog, if ever there was one. 'Decidedly,' thought I, 'my wits are to seek to-night'; and with the same, a sudden suspicion made me turn to my conductor, who had advanced to the left-hand door, and was waiting for me, with a hand on the knob.

'One moment!' I said. 'This is all very pretty, but how am I to know you're not sending me to bed while you fetch in all the countryside to lay me by the heels?'

'I'm afraid,' was his answer, 'you must be content with my word, as a gentleman, that never, to-night or hereafter, will I breathe a syllable about the circumstances of your visit. However, if you choose, we will return upstairs.'

'No; I'll trust you,' said I; and he opened the door.

It led into a broad passage paved with slate, upon which three or four rooms opened. He paused by the second and ushered me into a sleeping-chamber, which, though narrow, was comfortable enough—a vast improvement, at any rate, on the mumpers' lodgings I had been used to for many months past.

'You can undress here,' he said. 'The sheets are aired, and if you'll wait a moment, I'll fetch a nightshirt—one of my own.'

'Sir, you heap coals of fire on me.'

'Believe me that for ninety-nine of your qualities I do not care a tinker's curse; but for your palate you are to be taken care of.'

He shuffled away, but came back in a couple of minutes with the nightshirt.

'Good-night,' he called to me, flinging it in at the door; and without giving me time to return the wish, went his way upstairs.

Now it might be supposed I was only too glad to toss off my clothes and climb into the bed I had so unexpectedly acquired a right to. But, as a matter of fact, I did nothing of the kind. Instead, I drew on my boots and sat on the bed's edge, blinking at my candle till it died down in its socket, and afterwards at the purple square of window as it slowly changed to grey with the coming of dawn. I was cold to the heart, and my teeth chattered with an ague. Certainly I never suspected my host's word; but was even occupied in framing good resolutions and shaping out a reputable future, when I heard the front door gently pulled to, and a man's footsteps moving quietly to the gate.

The treachery knocked me in a heap for the moment. Then, leaping up and flinging my door wide, I stumbled

through the uncertain light of the passage into the front hall.

There was a fan-shaped light over the door, and the place was very still and grey. A quick thought, or, rather, a sudden prophetic guess at the truth, made me turn to the figure of the mastiff curled under the hall table.

I laid my hand on the scruff of his neck. He was quite limp, and my fingers sank into the flesh on either side of the vertebrae. Digging them deeper, I dragged him out into the middle of the hall and pulled the front door open to see the better.

His throat was gashed from ear to ear.

How many seconds passed after I dropped the senseless lump on the floor, and before I made another movement, it would puzzle me to say. Twice I stirred a foot as if to run out at the door. Then, changing my mind, I stepped over the mastiff, and ran up the staircase.

The passage at the top was now dark ; but groping down it, I found the study door open, as before, and passed in. A sick light stole through the blinds—enough for me to distinguish the glasses and decanters on the table, and find my way to the curtain that hung before the inner room.

I pushed the curtain aside, paused for a moment, and listened to the violent beat of my heart ; then felt for the door-handle and turned it.

All I could see at first was that the chamber was small ; next, that the light patch in a line with the window was the white coverlet of a bed ; and next that somebody, or something, lay on the bed.

I listened again. There was no sound in the room ; no heart beating but my own. I reached out a hand to pull up the blind, and drew it back again. I dared not.

The daylight grew minute by minute on the dull oblong of the blind, and minute by minute that horrible thing on the bed took something of distinctness.

The strain beat me at last. I fetched a loud yell to give myself courage, and, reaching for the cord, pulled up the blind as fast as it would go.

The face on the pillow was that of an old man—a face waxen and peaceful, with quiet lines about the mouth and eyes, and long lines of grey hair falling back from the temples. The body was turned a little on one side, and one hand lay outside the bed-clothes in a very natural manner. But there were two big dark stains on the pillow and coverlet.

Then I knew I was face to face with the real householder, and it flashed on me that I had been indiscreet in taking service as his butler, and that I knew the face his ex-butler wore.

And, being by this time awake to the responsibilities of the post, I quitted it three steps at a time, not once looking behind me. Outside the house the storm had died down, and white daylight was gleaming over the sodden moors. But my bones were cold, and I ran faster and faster.

From *I Saw Three Ships* (by kind permission of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and Messrs. Cassell & Co., Ltd.).

W. W. JACOBS

1863-

IN BORROWED PLUMES

THE master of the *Sarah Jane* had been missing for two days, and all on board, with the exception of the boy, whom nobody troubled about, were full of joy at the circumstance. Twice before had the skipper, whose habits might, perhaps, be best described as irregular, missed his ship, and word had gone forth that the third time would be the last. His berth was a good one, and the mate wanted it in place of his own, which was wanted by Ted Jones, A.B.

'Two hours more,' said the mate anxiously to the men, as they stood leaning against the side, 'and I take the ship out.'

'Under two hours 'll do it,' said Ted, peering over the side and watching the water as it slowly rose over the mud.

'What's got the old man, I wonder?'

'I don't know, and I don't care,' said the mate. 'You chaps stand by me and it 'll be good for all of us. Mr. Pearson said distinct the last time that if the skipper ever missed his ship again it would be his last trip in her, and he told me afore the old man that I wasn't to wait two minutes at any time, but to bring her out right away.'

'He's an old fool,' said Bill Loch, the other hand; 'and nobody 'll miss him but the boy, and he's been looking reg'lar worried all the morning. He looked so worried at dinner time that I give 'im a kick to cheer him up a bit. Look at him now.'

The mate gave a supercilious glance in the direction of the boy, and then turned away. The boy, who had no

idea of courting observation, stowed himself away behind the windlass ; and, taking a letter from his pocket, perused it for the fourth time.

'Dear Tommy,' it began. 'I take my pen in and to inform you that Ime stayin here and cant get away for the reason that I lorst my cloes at cribage larst night, also my money, and everything beside. Dont speak to a living sole about it as the mate wants my birth, but pack up sum cloes and bring them to me without saying nuthing to noboddy. The mates cloths will do becos I havent got enny other soot, dont tell 'im. You needen't trouble about soks as I've got them left. My hed is so bad I must now conclude. Your affecshunate uncle and captin Joe Bross. P.S. Dont let the mate see you come, or else he wont let you go.'

'Two hours more,' sighed Tommy, as he put the letter back in his pocket. 'How can I get any clothes when they're all locked up ? And aunt said I was to look after 'im and see he didn't get into no mischief.'

He sat thinking deeply, and then, as the crew of the *Sarah Jane* stepped ashore to take advantage of a glass offered by the mate, he crept down to the cabin again for another desperate look round. The only articles of clothing visible belonged to Mrs. Bross, who up to this trip had been sailing in the schooner to look after its master. At these he gazed hard.

'I'll take 'em and try an' swop 'em for some men's clothes,' said he suddenly, snatching the garments from the pegs. 'She wouldn't mind'; and hastily rolling them into a parcel, together with a pair of carpet slippers of the captain's, he thrust the lot into an old biscuit bag. Then he shouldered his burden, and, going cautiously on deck, gained the shore, and set off at a trot to the address furnished in the letter.

It was a long way, and the bag was heavy. His first attempt at barter was alarming, for the pawnbroker, who had just been cautioned by the police, was in such a severe and uncomfortable state of morals, that the boy quickly snatched up his bundle again and left. Sorely troubled he walked hastily along, until, in a small bye

street, his glance fell upon a baker of mild and benevolent aspect, standing behind the counter of his shop.

'If you please, sir,' said Tommy, entering, and depositing his bag on the counter, 'have you got any cast-off clothes you don't want?'

The baker turned to a shelf, and selecting a stale loaf cut it in halves, one of which he placed before the boy.

'I don't want bread,' said Tommy desperately; 'but mother has just died, and father wants mourning for the funeral. He's only got a new suit with him, and if he can change these things of mother's for an old suit, he'd sell his best ones to bury her with.'

He shook the articles out on the counter, and the baker's wife, who had just come into the shop, inspected them rather favourably.

'Poor boy, so you've lost your mother,' she said, turning the clothes over. 'It's a good skirt, Bill.'

'Yes, ma'am,' said Tommy dolefully.

'What did she die of?' inquired the baker.

'Scarlet fever,' said Tommy, tearfully, mentioning the only disease he knew.

'Scar—— Take them things away,' yelled the baker, pushing the clothes on to the floor, and following his wife to the other end of the shop. 'Take 'em away directly, you young villain.'

His voice was so loud, his manner so imperative, that the startled boy, without stopping to argue, stuffed the clothes pell-mell into the bag again and departed. A farewell glance at the clock made him look almost as horrified as the baker.

'There's no time to be lost,' he muttered, as he began to run; 'either the old man'll have to come in these or else stay where he is.'

He reached the house breathless, and paused before an unshaven man in time-worn greasy clothes, who was smoking a short clay pipe with much enjoyment in front of the door.

'Is Cap'n Bross here?' he panted.

'He's upstairs,' said the man, with a leer, 'sitting in

sackcloth and ashes, more ashes than sackcloth. Have you got some clothes for him ?'

'Look here,' said Tommy. He was down on his knees with the mouth of the bag open again, quite in the style of the practised hawker. 'Give me an old suit of clothes for them. Hurry up. There's a lovely frock.'

'Blimey,' said the man, staring. 'I've only got these clothes. Wot d'yer take me for ? A dook ?'

'Well, get me some somewhere,' said Tommy. 'If you don't the cap'n 'll have to come in these, and I'm sure he won't like it.'

'I wonder what he'd look like,' said the man, with a grin. 'Damme if I don't come up and see.'

'Get me some clothes,' pleaded Tommy.

'I wouldn't get you clothes, no, not for fifty pun,' said the man severely. 'Wot d'yer mean wanting to spoil people's pleasure in that way ? Come on, come and tell the cap'n what you've got for 'im, I want to 'ear what he ses. He's been swearing 'ard since ten o'clock this morning, but he ought to say something special over this.'

He led the way up the bare wooden stairs, followed by the harassed boy, and entered a small dirty room at the top, in the centre of which the master of the *Sarah Jane* sat to deny visitors, in a pair of socks and last week's paper.

'Here's a young gent come to bring you some clothes, cap'n,' said the man, taking the sack from the boy.

'Why didn't you come before ?' growled the captain, who was reading the advertisements.

The man put his hand in the sack, and pulled out the clothes. 'What do you think of 'em ?' he asked expectantly.

The captain strove vainly to tell him, but his tongue mercifully forsook its office, and dried between his lips. His brain rang with sentences of scorching iniquity, but they got no further.

'Well, say thank you, if you can't say nothing else,' suggested his tormentor hopefully.

'I couldn't bring nothing else,' said Tommy hurriedly ;

'all the things was locked up. I tried to swop 'em and nearly got locked up for it. Put these on and hurry up.'

The captain moistened his lips with his tongue.

'The mate 'll get off directly she floats,' continued Tommy. 'Put these on and spoil his little game. It's raining a little now. Nobody 'll see you, and as soon as you git aboard you can borrow some of the men's clothes.'

'That's the ticket, cap'n,' said the man. 'Lord lumme, you'll 'ave everybody falling in love with you.'

'Hurry up,' said Tommy, dancing with impatience. 'Hurry up.'

The skipper, dazed and wild-eyed, stood still while his two assistants hastily dressed him, bickering somewhat about details as they did so.

'He ought to be tight-laced, I tell you,' said the man.

'He can't be tight-laced without stays,' said Tommy scornfully. 'You ought to know that.'

'Ho, can't he,' said the other, discomfited. 'You know too much for a young-un. Well, put a bit o' line round 'im then.'

'We can't wait for a line,' said Tommy, who was standing on tip-toe to tie the skipper's bonnet on. 'Now tie the scarf over his chin to hide his beard, and put this veil on. It's a good job he ain't got a moustache.'

The other complied, and then fell back a pace or two to gaze at his handiwork. 'Strewth, though I ses it as shouldn't, you look a treat!' he remarked complacently. 'Now, young-un, take 'old of his arm. Go up the back streets, and if you see anybody looking at you, call 'im Mar.'

The two set off, after the man, who was a born realist, had tried to snatch a kiss from the skipper on the threshold. Fortunately for the success of the venture, it was pelting with rain, and, though a few people gazed curiously at the couple as they went hastily along, they were unmolested, and gained the wharf in safety, arriving just in time to see the schooner shoving off from the side.

At the sight the skipper held up his skirts and ran. 'Ahoy!' he shouted. 'Wait a minute.'

The mate gave one look of blank astonishment at the extraordinary figure, and then turned away ; but at that moment the stern came within jumping distance of the wharf, and uncle and nephew, moved with one impulse, leaped for it and gained the deck in safety.

'Why didn't you wait when I hailed you ?' demanded the skipper fiercely.

'How was I to know it was you ?' inquired the mate surlily, as he realised his defeat. 'I thought it was the Empress of Rooshia.'

The skipper stared at him dumbly.

'An' if you take my advice,' said the mate, with a sneer, 'you'll keep them things on. I never see you look so well in anything afore.'

'I want to borrow some o' your clothes, Bob,' said the skipper, eyeing him steadily.

'Where's your own ?' asked the other.

'I don't know,' said the skipper. 'I was took with a fit last night, Bob, and when I woke up this morning they were gone. Somebody must have took advantage of my helpless state and taken 'em.'

'Very likely,' said the mate, turning away to shout an order to the crew, who were busy setting sail.

'Where are they, old man ?' inquired the skipper.

'How should I know ?' asked the other, becoming interested in the men again.

'I mean *your* clothes,' said the skipper, who was fast losing his temper.

'Oh, mine ?' said the mate. 'Well, as a matter o' fact, I don't like lending my clothes. I'm rather per-tickler. You might have a fit in *them*.'

'You won't lend 'em to me ?' asked the skipper.

'I won't,' said the mate, speaking loudly, and frowning significantly at the crew, who were listening.

'Very good,' said the skipper. 'Ted, come here. Where's your other clothes ?'

'I'm very sorry, sir,' said Ted, shifting uneasily from one leg to the other, and glancing at the mate for support ; 'but they ain't fit for the likes of you to wear, sir.'

'I'm the best judge of that,' said the skipper sharply. 'Fetch 'em up.'

'Well, to tell the truth, sir,' said Ted, 'I'm like the mate. I'm only a poor sailor-man, but I wouldn't lend my clothes to the Queen of England.'

'You fetch up them clothes,' roared the skipper, snatching off his bonnet and flinging it on the deck. 'Fetch 'em up at once. D'ye think I'm going about in these petticoats?'

'They're my clothes,' muttered Ted doggedly.

'Very well, then, I'll have Bill's,' said the skipper. 'But mind you, my lad, I'll make you pay for this afore I've done with you. Bill's the only honest man aboard this ship. Gimme your hand, Bill, old man.'

'I'm with them two,' said Bill gruffly, as he turned away.

The skipper, biting his lips with fury, turned from one to the other, and then, with a big oath, walked forward. Before he could reach the fo'c'sle Bill and Ted dived down before him, and, by the time he had descended, sat on their chests side by side confronting him. To threats and appeals alike they turned a deaf ear, and the frantic skipper was compelled at last to go on deck again, still encumbered with the hated skirts.

'Why don't you go an' lay down,' said the mate, 'an' I'll send you down a nice cup o' hot tea. You'll get histericks, if you go on like that.'

'I'll knock your 'ead off if you talk to me,' said the skipper.

'Not you,' said the mate cheerfully; 'you ain't big enough. Look at that pore fellow over there.'

The skipper looked in the direction indicated, and, swelling with impotent rage, shook his fist fiercely at a red-faced man with grey whiskers, who was wafting innumerable tender kisses from the bridge of a passing steamer.

'That's right,' said the mate approvingly; 'don't give 'im no encouragement. Love at first sight ain't worth having.'

The skipper, suffering severely from suppressed emotion,

went below, and the crew, after waiting a little while to make sure that he was not coming up again, made their way quietly to the mate.

'If we can only take him to Battlesea in this rig it'll be all right,' said the latter. 'You chaps stand by me. His slippers and sou-wester is the only clothes he's got aboard. Chuck every needle you can lay your hands on overboard, or else he'll git trying to make a suit out of a piece of old sail or something. If we can only take him to Mr. Pearson like this, it won't be so bad after all.'

While these arrangements were in hand above, the skipper and the boy were busy over others below. Various startling schemes propounded by the skipper for obtaining possession of his men's attire were rejected by the youth as unlawful, and, what was worse, impracticable. For a couple of hours they discussed ways and means, but only ended in diatribes against the mean ways of the crew; and the skipper, whose head ached still from his excesses, fell into a state of sullen despair at length, and sat silent.

'By Jove, Tommy, I've got it,' he cried suddenly, starting up and hitting the table with his fist. 'Where's your other suit?'

'That ain't no bigger than this one,' said Tommy.

'You git it out,' said the skipper with a knowing toss of his head. 'Ah, there we are. Now go in my state-room and take those off.'

The wondering Tommy, who thought that great grief had turned his kinsman's brain, complied, and emerged shortly afterwards in a blanket, bringing his clothes under his arm.

'Now, do you know what I'm going to do?' inquired the skipper, with a big smile.

'No.'

'Fetch me the scissors, then. Now do you know what I'm going to do?'

'Cut up the two suits and make 'em into one,' hazarded the horror-stricken Tommy. 'Here, stop it! Leave off!'

The skipper pushed him impatiently off, and, placing

the clothes on the table, took up the scissors, and, with a few slashing strokes, cut the garments into their component parts.

'What am I to wear,' said Tommy, beginning to blubber. 'You didn't think of that?'

'What are you to wear, you selfish young pig?' said the skipper sternly. 'Always thinking about yourself. Go and git some needles and thread, and if there's any left over, and you're a good boy, I'll see whether I can't make something for you out of the leavings.'

'There ain't no needles here,' whined Tommy, after a lengthened search.

'Go down the fo'c'sle and git the case of sail-makers' needles, then,' said the skipper. 'Don't let anyone see what you're after, an' some thread.'

'Well, why couldn't you let me go in my clothes before you cut 'em up,' moaned Tommy. 'I don't like going up in this blanket. They'll laugh at me.'

'You go at once!' thundered the skipper, and, turning his back on him, whistled softly, and began to arrange the pieces of cloth.

'Laugh away, my lads,' he said cheerfully, as an uproarious burst of laughter greeted the appearance of Tommy on deck. 'Wait a bit.'

He waited himself for nearly twenty minutes, at the end of which time Tommy, treading on his blanket, came flying down the companion-ladder, and rolled into the cabin.

'There ain't a needle aboard the ship,' he said solemnly, as he picked himself up and rubbed his head. 'I've looked everywhere.'

'What?' roared the skipper, hastily concealing the pieces of cloth. 'Here, Ted! Ted!'

'Ay, ay, sir!' said Ted, as he came below.

'I want a sail-maker's needle,' said the skipper glibly. 'I've got a rent in this skirt.'

'I broke the last one yesterday,' said Ted, with an evil grin.

'Any other needle then,' said the skipper, trying to conceal his emotion.

'I don't believe there's such a thing aboard the ship,' said Ted, who had obeyed the mate's thoughtful injunction. 'Nor thread. I was only saying so to the mate yesterday.'

The skipper sank again to the lowest depths, waved him away, and then, getting on a corner of the locker, fell into a gloomy reverie.

'It's a pity you do things in such a hurry,' said Tommy, sniffing vindictively. 'You might have made sure of the needle before you spoiled my clothes. There's two of us going about ridiculous now.'

The master of the *Sarah Jane* allowed this insolence to pass unheeded. It is in moments of deep distress that the mind of man, naturally reverting to solemn things, seeks to improve the occasion by a lecture. The skipper, chastened by suffering and disappointment, stuck his right hand in his pocket, after a lengthened search for it, and gently bidding the blanketed urchin in front of him to sit down, began:

'You see what comes of drink and cards,' he said mournfully. 'Instead of being at the helm of my ship, racing all the other craft down the river, I'm skulkin' down below here like—like'——

'Like an actress,' suggested Tommy.

The skipper eyed him all over. Tommy, unconscious of offence, met his gaze serenely.

'If,' continued the skipper, 'at any time you felt like taking too much and you stopped with the beer-mug halfway to your lips, and thought of me sitting in this disgraceful state, what would you do?'

'I dunno,' replied Tommy, yawning.

'What would you do?' persisted the skipper, with great expression.

'Laugh, I s'pose,' said Tommy, after a moment's thought.

The sound of a well-boxed ear rang through the cabin.

'You're an unnatural, ungrateful little toad,' said the skipper fiercely. 'You don't deserve to have a good, kind uncle to look after you.'

'Anybody can have him for me,' sobbed the indignant

Tommy, as he tenderly felt his ear. 'You look a precious sight more like an aunt than an uncle.'

After firing this shot he vanished in a cloud of blanket, and the skipper, reluctantly abandoning a hastily-formed resolve of first flaying him alive and then flinging him overboard, sat down again and lit his pipe.

Once out of the river he came on deck again, and, ignoring by a great effort the smiles of the crew and the jibes of the mate, took command. The only alteration he made in his dress was to substitute his sou'-wester for the bonnet, and in this guise he did his work while the aggrieved Tommy hopped it in blankets. The three days at sea passed like a horrid dream. So covetous was his gaze, that the crew instinctively clutched their nether garments and looked to the buttoning of their coats as they passed him. He saw coats in the mainsail, and fashioned phantom trousers out of the flying jib, and towards the end began to babble of blue serges and mixed tweeds. Oblivious of fame, he had resolved to enter the harbour of Battlesea by night; but it was not to be. Near home the wind dropped, and the sun was well up before Battlesea came into view, a grey bank on the starboard bow.

Until within a mile of the harbour, the skipper held on, and then his grasp on the wheel relaxed somewhat, and he looked round anxiously for the mate.

'Where's Bob?' he shouted.

'He's very ill, sir,' said Ted, shaking his head.

'Ill?' gasped the startled skipper. 'Here, take the wheel a minute.'

He handed it over, and grasping his skirts went hastily below. The mate was half lying, half sitting, in his bunk, groaning dismally.

'What's the matter?' inquired the skipper.

'I'm dying,' said the mate. 'I keep being tied up all in knots inside. I can't hold myself straight.'

The other cleared his throat. 'You'd better take off your clothes and lie down a bit,' he said kindly. 'Let me help you off with them.'

'No—don't—trouble,' panted the mate.

'It ain't no trouble,' said the skipper, in a trembling voice.

'No, I'll keep 'em on,' said the mate faintly. 'I've always had an idea I'd like to die in my clothes. It may be foolish, but I can't help it.'

'You'll have your wish some day, never fear, you infernal rascal,' shouted the overwrought skipper. 'You're shamming sickness to make me take the ship into port.'

'Why shouldn't you take her in,' asked the mate, with an air of innocent surprise. 'It's your duty as cap'n. You'd better get above now. The bar is always shifting.'

The skipper, restraining himself by a mighty effort, went on deck again, and, taking the wheel, addressed the crew. He spoke feelingly of the obedience men owed their superior officers, and the moral obligation they were under to lend them their trousers when they required them. He dwelt on the awful punishments awarded for mutiny, and proved clearly, that to allow the master of a ship to enter port in petticoats was mutiny of the worst type. He then sent them below for their clothing. They were gone such a long time that it was palpable to the meanest intellect that they did not intend to bring it. Meantime the harbour widened out before him.

There were two or three people on the quay as the *Sarah Jane* came within hailing distance. By the time she had passed the lantern at the end of it there were two or three dozen, and the numbers were steadily increasing at the rate of three persons for every five yards she made. Kind-hearted, humane men, anxious that their friends should not lose so great and cheap a treat, bribed small and reluctant boys with pennies to go in search of them, and by the time the schooner reached her berth, a large proportion of the population of the port was looking over each other's shoulders and shouting foolish and hilarious inquiries to the skipper. The news reached the owner, and he came hurrying down to the ship, just as the skipper, regardless of the heated remonstrances of the sightseers, was preparing to go below.

Mr. Pearson was a stout man, and he came down

exploding with wrath. Then he saw the apparition, and mirth overcame him. It became necessary for three stout fellows to act as buttresses, and the more indignant the skipper looked, the harder their work became. Finally he was assisted, in a weak state, and laughing hysterically, to the deck of the schooner, where he followed the skipper below, and in a voice broken with emotion demanded an explanation.

'It's the finest sight I ever saw in my life, Bross,' he said when the other had finished. 'I wouldn't have missed it for anything. I've been feeling very low this last week and it's done me good. Don't talk nonsense about leaving the ship. I wouldn't lose you for anything after this, but if you like to ship a fresh mate and crew you can please yourself. If you'll only come up to the house and let Mrs. Pearson see you—she's been ailing—I'll give you a couple of pounds. Now, get your bonnet and come.'

From *Many Cargoes* (by kind permission of Mr. W. W. Jacobs).

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